

# WOE THEN GO

## ISAIAH 6:1-9

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple.

Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!" And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke.

So I said: "Woe is me, for I am undone!

Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts."

Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth with it, and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged." Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?"

Then I said, "Here am I! Send me." And He said, "Go..."

There are events in life that impact us so dramatically we're never the same after witnessing them. They have a lingering influence.

A **soldier** who has seen combat has the horrors of war indelibly burned into his memory... **Astronauts** who've been outside Earth's atmosphere tell us they no longer see life on this planet from the same perspective...

A **father** who was there for the birth of his baby comes away with a whole new attitude toward his work, and his wife, and his responsibilities.

But none of these experiences rival the impact that a vision of God has on a person's life. Once you meet God you can never, ever be the same.

**Moses** climbed a mountain as a simple shepherd, but near the top he met God, and he returned a champion and deliverer of a nation.

**Jacob** was a scoundrel, but one night he wrestled with God. Come daybreak he was a new man with a new name – "*Israel*" or "*prince of God.*"

**Saul** hated Christians. Yet on the road to Damascus he met the Jesus he'd been persecuting. When he rose from his knees the *persecutor* turned *preacher*. Christianity's leading *opponent* was now its chief *proponent*.

Thomas Aquinas was a brilliant, young theologian.

He wrote a massive multi-volume systematic theology called "*Summa Theologica*" - but on his deathbed Thomas had a vision of God's glory.

He said in response, “What I have seen makes all that I have previously taught and written seem as but chaff (*or mere straw*) to me.”

One glimpse of God’s glory – one moment with Majesty – can do that. It can reorient, and transform, and revolutionize a man’s entire perspective.

Such was the case when Isaiah met God. It was an experience that changed his life forever! In chapter 6, Isaiah recounts his vision of God, and describes the radical impact it had on the trajectory of his life.

Isaiah’s vision was threefold. He **saw God**. Then in contrast to God’s glory he **saw himself** - which led to him **seeing people around him** in a new light. Isaiah saw *God, himself, and others* - and was never the same.

Every one of us needs a similar vision of God.

In verse 1, Isaiah writes, “**In the year that King Uzziah died...**”

Isaiah’s vision of God left such a profound impression he never forgot the year it occurred. Historians refer to it as 740 BC, but the prophet Isaiah always remembered it, and marked it, as “**the year that King Uzziah died.**”

Hebrew tradition suggests Isaiah was the younger cousin of Uzziah.

King Uzziah was a good and godly man. He may’ve mentored his cousin, Isaiah. Uzziah occupied the throne for 52 years – that’s a long time, the equivalent of 13 presidential terms. King Uzziah was a fixture on the

leadership landscape of Judah. He was a source of security to Isaiah.

Yet now suddenly, shockingly the king is dead – the throne is vacant.

Uzziah is no longer in charge, and Isaiah is tempted to panic. *“We’ve lost our leader. What will the nation do without Uzziah? What will I do?”*

Yet it’s then that God gives Isaiah this vision. The throne isn’t vacant after all... God still sits in majesty. He still calls shots. God is still in control!

And what was true for Israel of old, is true for the Church today.

God uses men – and we’re thankful for their service - but when one man's work is done, he raises up another. If the Lord tarries, one of these days I’ll be gone. I’ll probably croak trying to run my three miles. Charles Wesley once wrote, *“God buries His workmen, but He carries on His work.”*

None of us are indispensable. The truths we teach are true, and biblical, and eternal. They’ve been taught from centuries past, and transcend any one teacher. It’s the Holy Spirit who picks the tools and continues the work.

Here at CC we’re learning to keep our eyes on God - not man.

Isaiah writes, “In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple.”

This is amazing - for a moment the veil which separates the physical realm from the spiritual is peeled back, and Isaiah is given a glimpse into the throne room of the eternal God.

He sees God's **sovereignty** – He’s sitting on a throne.

He sees God’s **splendor** – He is high and lifted up.

He sees God’s **superiority** - His train fills the Temple.

Evidently the robe God wore filled up the entire Temple. The word translated “*train*” or “*shule*” means “*hem*.” It was the “*fringe or border at the bottom of a robe*.” The train of God’s robe filled and dominated the room.

In the ancient world the hem of a person’s garment designated his authority. OT priests had their genealogies embroidered into the border of their robes. Their appointment to office – their authority - was a result of their pedigree, and their lineage was shown on the hem of their robe.

A noblemen’s rank was often written on the border of his garment.

Remember when Saul walked into the cave where David and his men were hiding, David snuck up, and clipped off the hem of the king’s robe.

Later he apologized to Saul for his reckless act. Even though David could’ve killed Saul, but didn’t – the mere

act of defacing the border of the king's royal robe was still an insult to his God-ordained authority.

Recall the woman who'd been hemorrhaging blood for 12 years. She wanted to be healed, so she reached out in faith, *and touched where?*

*The hem of Jesus' robe...* By reaching her hand for the border of His tunic she was trusting in Jesus' power and authority over her sickness.

Thus when Isaiah sees the hem of God's robe fill up the temple he realizes God's authority is unsurpassed. He is indeed *the most high God!*

In verse 2 Isaiah notices that above the throne, **“Stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.”** According to the Bible angels come in two varieties - cherubim and seraphim. And neither form, even remotely resembles the popular image of the cute, chubby, baby-like, little angel.

In the Bible angels are warriors who strike fear in the hearts of those who encounter them. This word **“seraphim”** means **“burning ones.”**

These were flying torches above God's throne – a heavenly air show. The US Navy has *The Blue Angels*. The seraphim were fiery angels.

And Isaiah reports that these angels had six wings.

Two wings covered their face – *the glory of God was too much for their eyes to handle...* Two wings covered their feet – *they felt too humble to stand in God's presence...* And two wings kept them suspended over the throne – *it speaks of their tireless, constant service and praise to God.*

“And one cried to another and said: **“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!”** They could've cried *“merciful, merciful, merciful...”* or *“faithful, faithful, faithful...”* or *“mighty, mighty, mighty”* – for God is certainly merciful and faithful and mighty. But instead the angels cried, **“holy, holy, holy”** – they were caught up in His holiness.

The word **“holy”** means **“set apart.”** It speaks of God's uniqueness. He's a cut above all others. God has no peer. There is no one like our God.

Its one thing to say **“God is love”** - but to say He's **“holy”** is to say He loves like no one else loves... To say **“God is strong”** is true, but to say **“He's holy”** means *He's strongest*. Whatever the subject you're discussing when you say **“God is holy”** you're saying He's in a class all by Himself.

And notice the angels shout of his holiness three times - **“holy, holy, holy”** - *why three holies?* I would suppose Isaiah didn't want to leave anyone out. For there are three members of the Godhead: *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit* – and all three are worthy to be praised for their holiness.

In verse 4 Isaiah describes what happens next, “**And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke.**” You can’t call it an “**earthquake**” because Isaiah is not on earth. You could call it a “**heaven quake,**” or maybe a “**God-quake.**”

God's might and the seraphim's shout shake the temple...

His majesty and glory fill up the room with a celestial smoke...

All heaven quivers as the Almighty flexes His muscle...

It could be the smoke was released to shield Isaiah, the human observer, from the intensity of God's glory. *What a sight it must've been...*

*If you saw such a vision what would be the first word out of your mouth?*

If you're a holdover from the 60s you'd probably say, “**Far out.**”

If you grew up in the 70s you might say, “**Radical, man.**”

If you're from the 80s you could say, “**Excellent, dude.**”

If you're from the hood you would say, “**Yo, that's bad, brotha.**”

If you're from the country you might say, “**Well, I'll be...**”

If you ever watch Gomer Pyle reruns you could say, “**Shazam.**”

After a vision like Isaiah's I think I would say, “**Holy Smoke.**”



You could say, “Cool”, “Narly”, “Awesome” - or just, “Wow.”

But notice Isaiah’s response, verse 5, “So I said: “Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.” Isaiah’s responds not with a “wow,” but with a “woe.” “Woe is me.”

Isaiah doesn’t say, “Wow, look at that!” but, “Woe, look at me!” Instead of astonishment over *what he’s seen*, Isaiah mourns over *what he’s been*.

There is nothing like a vision of God to empty us of ourselves!

I always question the validity of the person who runs around boasting about his or her experience with God. If they’re pompous and proud they haven’t even met Him. Whenever a person encounters the true God his conscious is crushed by the depth of his own lack, and sin, and depravity.

Up against a holy God we’re forced to face the disparity between *our goodness* and *God’s goodness*. Suddenly we realize it’s a grand canyon.

Remember the effect Job’s vision of God had on him. Job had become so puffed up with pride. He’d questioned and doubted the fairness of God’s dealings with man. Finally God said “*Enough is enough!*” He shuts Job up.

God appears in a whirlwind. And with a series of question that only God Himself can answer – God whittles an arrogant Job back down to size.

Afterward Job tells God, "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." A vision of God restored Job to the proper perspective.

Understand Isaiah belonged to God before he received this vision.

Even before this vision Isaiah was a prophet who'd been busy exposing everyone else's sin. He served the Lord. Isaiah was a decent person. There were no major skeletons in his closet. He had nothing to cover-up.

But with this vision, the light of God's holiness caused him to see himself as never before. God's 100-proof holiness exposed sin Isaiah didn't even know existed. Isaiah became conscious of his true condition.

Isaiah's vision was "a deep in the refrigerator" type of experience. If there's ever a funny smell in the kitchen, go to the back of the fridge. In the very back you'll find the pungent, smelly stuff you didn't know was there.

God does a deep-fridge search into Isaiah's life and finds what's rotten.

It's said, "Not until we see God as He really is, can we see ourselves as we really are!" Isaiah didn't see *his sinfulness*, until he saw *God's holiness*.

Again he says in verse 4, “Woe is me, for I am undone.”

The word “*undone*” means “*lacking, or deficient.*” Isaiah is admitting, “*I don't measure up to God's standards. I'm not what He expects me to be.*”

And this is always the reaction. Whenever I come in contact with God's *holiness* I become conscious of the *holes* in my own character.

And notice, Isaiah doesn't just say he has unclean lips. His problem is not an occasional *slip of the lip*. He says, “**I am a man of unclean lips.**”

His problem is not just *what he says* – it runs deeper, it's *who he is* – his words are the issue or flow of his heart. He's admitting it's his tendency to rebel. Our problem too lies deeper than our lips. Our heart is defiled.

It's the inner parts of us that need to be cleansed.

Through this vision, God is breaking Isaiah. And understand, before God can use any of us, He first has to break us! In Psalm 51:17 David cried out “**The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart - these, O God, You will not despise.**” David too, had to be broken.

Brokenness is coming to the end of my rope.

True humility is learning over and over again that it's “**not I, but Christ.**” And notice the letter “**C**” in Christ. What is it, but an “**I**” that's bent over?

A “**C**” is an “**I**” that's willing to *bend* and *bow* before God.

It always amazes me to remember the broken things God uses...

Gideon's jars... Mary's vial of perfume... even our Lord's own body on the cross... *they were all broken before they could serve God's purposes.*

Recall the little boy's five loaves. Jesus did four things with the bread. *He took it, blessed it, broke it, and gave it.* Perhaps, He's taken you out of the world and brought you to Himself. He's blessed you abundantly, and wants to use your life for His sake. But first, you need to be broken.

Between the *blessing* and the *giving* there's always some *brokenness*.

Sometimes I'll refer to cinematic classics to illustrate my sermons.

I'll do so this morning. There's a scene in Rocky IV where the menacing Russian heavyweight, Ivan Drago, looks at Rocky and he says, "*I must break you.*" When we think of being broken that's how we tend to envision the process. God is going to bust my chops - put me out of commission.

But that's not God's intention at all. God is no Ivan Drago. He breaks us to better us. He breaks us to use us.

Even after He saves us we're still too full of ourselves. If he fed us to folks immediately they'd choke on our arrogance. We'd cause indigestion! He breaks us of ourselves to make us digestible.

Brokenness is painful, but it's necessary. Oscar Wilde once put it, "How else but through a broken heart may the Lord Christ enter in?" Before the wine can flow the grape first has to be crushed. The same is true with us.

Oswald Chambers once observed. "God can never make us wine if we object to the fingers he uses to crush us. If God would only use his own fingers, and make us broken bread and poured-out wine in a special way!

But when he uses someone whom we dislike (a pastor, professor, boss, or ornery neighbor), or some set of circumstances to which we said we would never submit, and makes those the crushers, we object." And then he concludes, "We must never choose the scene of our own martyrdom."

God alone knows exactly what it'll take to bring us to the place He wants us. Don't fight it! The clay needs to submit to the will of the potter.

This is what Isaiah did, and the results are in verse 6, "Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth with it, and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged." It reminds me of 1John 1:9, "If we confess our sin He is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

When Isaiah repents there's an amazing reaction in heaven.

All the activity stops dead in its tracks... The posts of the temple stop shaking. The cries of praise cease. The holy smoke clears. Heaven comes to a standstill. Incredibly, the attention shifts from the God of the universe to a lowly human – one of billions – a humble Hebrew named *Isaiah*.

And this surprising scene has incredible implications. It's like stopping the London Philharmonic Orchestra because one trumpet player coughs.

All the seraphim *halt their holies* to send one of their own to purge the lips of a single sinner. Here is God's grace and mercy on display.

God is willing to call off His praises to purge one repentant heart.

This seraph flies to the altar. He uses sacred tongs to pick up a hot brisket. He takes the burning coal. He flies straight to Isaiah, and touches the brand to his lips. He touches Isaiah at the very point of his impurity.

*And oh, how we need a similar touch from God!* I know you love God. I know you desire His touch of warmth, and comfort, and healing, and power, but has He touched you to purify you? *Have you gotten the point?*

Once I went to the doctor for a check up. I had a mole on my neck that my nurse-wife thought looked suspicious and wanted me to have removed.

I was thinking they'd wax it off – maybe apply a solution and dissolve it off – but I underestimated the procedure. This was no cosmetic operation.

The doctor told me the mole had to be BURNED OFF. Ouch!

Understand God deals with sin two ways: He **pardons** and **purges**.

The moment you're saved He *pardons* your sin. The Judge sits on the bench in heaven and declares you forgiven, clean, perfect in Christ Jesus.

But the Judge is also a Surgeon who cuts us, drains the infection, and puts a hot coal to the sinful spot. He cauterizes the wound. He *purges* us.

Back to that mole Kathy wanted me to have removed... Burning it off was a little more than I had bargained for - *but the story gets worse...*

I actually had two moles, a matching pair on either side of my neck. So when I got home, and Kathy inspected the damage, she realized I'd made a mistake. I had the doctor burn off the wrong mole. He left the suspicious one. It's a good thing it wasn't dangerous because it's still there.

**Yet God is much more precise.** He knows exactly what to burn. So often one sin leads to another – and if you don't catch the source of the sin it'll keep popping up in other areas. You can deal with action after action, but it

does no good until you purge the attitude that causes the sin.

God works not just *for us*, but *in us*. He touches us at the point of our impurity. He deals with the root problem. Isaiah admitted he was “*a man of unclean lips,*” and that’s the place God touched him with the coal - his lips.

Isaiah’s vision affected how *he saw God* – and how *he saw himself*. But its effect was not yet complete. It also changed how *he saw other people*.

In verse 8 Isaiah says, “*Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying...*”

Notice, once Isaiah is purged of his sin, he hears God speak. His *unclean lips* caused *stopped-up ears*. It took Isaiah getting his heart in the right place before he could hear what God wanted to speak into his life.

This is such an important principle to grasp.

Most Christians I know spend endless hours trying to hear the voice of God. Here’s the question I’m asked most often, “*How do I know when God speaks to me?*” We’re all so worried we might miss God’s voice - so we strain, and fret, and go out of our way to make sure we’re listening...

Notice what happens here: it’s when Isaiah gets his heart right with God that he overhears God speaking... You only have to strain and stretch when you’re out of position. Once Isaiah clears the static on the line, he



hears God clearly. Once his sin is purged all the bars pop up on his phone.

If we spent the effort we used trying to listen to God, and spent it on obeying God and doing His will we would hear His voice loud and clear.

When Isaiah sees God - and sees himself for who he is - he suddenly overhears God saying, "**Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?**"

And notice Isaiah's response, verse 8, "**Then I said, Here am I! Send me.**" When God called Moses, he had excuses. When He called Jeremiah, he said he was too young. But when God calls Isaiah, he's eager... He's seen God's majesty. He won't be content until his life adds to God's glory.

The Lord hasn't even issued a direct call to Isaiah. He just overhears Him. He's seeking someone to send. Isaiah jumps up, and waves his hand!

He volunteers, "**Here am I! Send me.**"

And though God's reply is short, it's profound. He tells Isaiah "**Go!**"

When you've seen God in His glory – when you've been in His holy presence – when your sin is purged by a hot coal from the altar - *your spiritual senses grow sharper and clearer... your hearing peaks!*

You become aware of issues that concern God. The spiritual world around you opens up to you in a way you've never experienced.

Suddenly you're hearing the horrible sound of footsteps... people you know and love marching off to hell. You hear the groans of the God who died to save sinners, and wants to reach them. You hear heaven rejoice when one sinner repents. *Where have you been? How have been so deaf?*

It begins to dawn on you the stakes are a lot higher than you thought.

Serving God is no longer an optional pastime. It's now more than a hobby – it's more than just something you do for the fun and fellowship.

This is serious business. Heaven and hell hang in the balance.

When folks ask me to describe how I was called to be a pastor I take them to this passage. For years I lived my life from selfish ambition. Even in my attempts to serve God, I had ulterior motives. *What was in it for me?*

But when Sandy Adams saw the Holy One – when God challenged me with a personal vision of His glory and grace - everything changed!

I became terribly conscious of my sin and selfishness. God purged my heart. He purified my motives. He touched me with the hot coal of grace.

We all want to know God's will, but here's what we overlook - **God changes and cleanses before He calls.** He breaks us - then gives us away.

For me, it was when *my heart* got right - then I overheard *God's heart*, "*Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?*" That's when I enlisted...

And amazingly, God said "**Go!**" And I've been going every since.

Isaiah saw this vision of God, "*In the year that King Uzziah died...*"

That was 2,750 years ago – and God's desires haven't changed. He's still looking - still calling – still sending... God wants you and I to GO!

He wants to send us out with the good news, into a bad news world.

But here's what Isaiah learned – a **WOE** precedes the **GO**. Before we *do what God calls us to do* we have to *be who God has called us to be!*

Here's my hope for you today...

May God give you a fresh vision of His glory and holiness... May a hot coal from off His altar touch the part of you that's sinful, and holding you back... May you overhear God speak... *And then may you respond, "Here am I! Send me."* Once you've seen a vision of God you're never the same!