

Real Health for Hard Hearts

What is a Holy God like?

- What is God like?
 - all have mental pictures - man on the clouds, Morgan Freeman in Bruce Almighty, whatever!
 - if we have come to love the Lord, we'll want to get to know him better...!
 - series over the next few Sunday mornings - **what is God like - and what is it like to meet a God who is... XXXX?**
- This morning - God is a holy God

The Thrice Holy God

- There you are in the Temple, taking your part in the rituals of worship, and God bursts in!
- Reveals self to Isaiah in a vision, picture, image - God on throne is not described though throne and effects on Temple and attendants are
- Exalted throne... Huge long train from his royal robe... Filled Temple
- Amazing heavenly attendants! Their voices shook Temple (great door-posts rumbling)
- Power, authority, kingship are all here

HOLY God

- But that is, in a sense, incidental to the focus and thrust of the vision!
 - **thrust is God's holiness**
- All the trappings of power and authority are naturally part of the way anyone would describe God - they form the **backdrop** for the real action:
 - the characteristic of God highlighted by the heavenly attendants is God's holiness
 - he is superlatively holy - not just once, but three times
 - just saying "Holy" wouldn't be enough
 - even these perfect, powerful, majestic attendants of the king of kings need to hide themselves from his holiness with their wings - face and feet (**v.2**)
- Awesome moral purity. Utterly just. Incapable of fudging. Perfection burning bright. Incandescent righteousness. Completely faithful
- Sometimes we allow ourselves to forget this face of God
 - we remember his love and mercy, esp. in Christ - and forget why Jesus' death was necessary
 - for in the face of such holiness even the purest, the best of humans is a dirty rag
- **A Holy God is a dangerous God**
 - such was Isaiah, crying out his woe: **"Woe to me! I am ruined!"**
- In the presence of the Living God, **in the presence of absolute holiness**, he not only deserved to die, but **would die if God did not intervene**:
 - like bringing a petrol soaked rag near an open fire, its going to ignite!
- Not some calm religious observance - **"Oh, woe to me, I am ruined."** - he is **distraught**
- His sin is loathsome to him - and he can't do anything about it
 - note that its only a normal, little sin - **a man of unclean lips** - hardly murder!

Holiness Satisfied

- **BUT** God steps in:
 - obliteration is not why he drew back the curtain on reality for Isaiah
 - *(This is the actual situation we too face - unclean before an awesomely holy God)*
- God steps in - God sends coal from altar:
 - normally in OT fire is wrathful rather than cleansing - but not here - here

- symbolises cleansing, burning away of dross
- the coal comes from the altar
- the place where cleansing has been bought, where punishment has been taken by another
- symbolised by the blood of animals in Isaiah's day
- Living after Calvary we know it was Jesus' sacrifice that paid the ultimate price
 - God satisfied his own holiness by burning away our guilt in Jesus...
 - God acted - Isaiah contributed nothing
 - and note how God symbolically cleanses the very part of Isaiah that he was most conscious of being sinful - lips
 - no doubt there were other sins, but God reassured Isaiah of his forgiveness

Forgiven - now be Holy

- Pause for a moment before looking at Isaiah's commission
 - verse in 1 Peter...
 - *"But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do" 1 Peter 1:15*
 - God is holy - his call is for us to be holy...
- A word picture might help:
 - God wants a bride for his Son Jesus:
 - that's who we are, the church, the bride of Christ
 - he had to win us at Calvary
 - we are his betrothed - we will be married to the Son of the King - we're part of God's family
 - but we're still grubby on the outside - brazen hussies with engagement rings on!
 - slow to become like our beloved - often shaming him
- So God invites us to become holy - to become like him - to more and more be ready for our forthcoming marriage

Becoming Holy

- How do we become holy? Not time, place, nor passage to look in depth at process of sanctification, of becoming like Jesus - but John White said in his book "Holiness":
- *In health terms, the best way of making people healthier is by preventing them from becoming unwell. "Prevention is better than cure."*
- So it is with holiness - it is easier, and better, to concentrate on the one who is holy rather than on what makes us unholy!
 - Cf. Isaiah - as his vision was filled with the Thrice Holy God, he soon saw where he was less than holy and wanted rid of it!
 - Avoids guilt trip of rolling round in your mind all the ways you are imperfect
 - Spend time with Jesus. Seek to serve him. Share him with others. Look up!
- Like getting ready for any other marriage - best preparation is time spent with your betrothed, learning and growing together, getting to know them

Isaiah Cleansed and also Commissioned

Recap

- God is exceedingly Holy!
 - exposure to Holy God makes us acutely aware of our sin, and need for his forgiveness
 - should also make us want to be holy now - so look to the holy one
 - finally, exposure to holy God, encounter with him always results in us being commissioned:

Whom shall I send?

- Confess to finding one of the funnier incidents in Scripture!
- Isaiah in Temple, no one else around, bumps into awesome, Almighty, Holy God - Temple shaking and quaking. Isaiah cleansed. God muses *"who shall I send?!"*!!!
 - as if there was ever any doubt who God wanted to send!

- why not "Right Isaiah, I've got a job for you..."??

- I remember Saturday mornings as a child. "Who'll help me... clean car, wash windows, mow the lawn...?" Particular - old noticeboards with blackboard paint
 - Dad do easier on own (still got pictures of the mess!)
 - "Who'll help me?" "ME!"
 - he wanted to spend time, to build relationship, to help me grow up - to be with him
- Same with God!
 - "Who shall I send...?" "Here am I. Send ME!"

A Hard Calling

- *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. (Isaiah 6:9-10)*

- Council of despair? No - preachers dilemma of making ever more clear, and "helping" hearers to harden their hearts
 - we too face a hard calling - don't we often feel like giving up on speaking out for God? How can we express what is so close to our hearts, yet so strange on our lips?
 - maybe we can't imagine God actually speaking through us?
 - hard - yet there is hope in this call
 - the stump will sprout again
- Even if we, like Isaiah, face a hardened generation, God will preserve a stump, his own people, who will grow again and flourish despite the desolation

Hard Calling in Holy Context

- But the hardness of the call *pales into insignificance beside the awesomeness of Isaiah's amazing vision of the Holy God*
 - let us focus on the Lord - the Lord who is glorious above all others, who is totally pure, incandescent, blazing in glorious holiness
 - then there will be for us nothing more wonderful than becoming holy, as he is holy...
 - becoming the spotless bride God desires for his son
 - then we will always be ready to say: "Here am I. Send me!" as God calls
- "Here am I. Send me!"