

A DIVINE ENCOUNTER

Have you ever thought about what it would be like to encounter the physical presence of God? Have you yourself ever had a personal encounter with God through the pages of His word and what was that like for you if you have? The reality for all of us is that we will meet Him one day! The question is what will that day be like?

Welcome to **Week 1 of PREPARE THE WAY!** Today we begin part 5 of our 8 part journey Through the Bible. The tension of the next 8 weeks will be filled with a call for God's people (Israel) to turn back to God and to be reminded that a SAVIOR is coming to deliver them and us out of the mess we have made with our lives due to our disobedience. Up to this point we have seen the fall of mankind into sin, God establishing a special people (Israel) to deliver His word of hope to the world, God's people rising to the pinnacle of what it means to walk in the blessings of God, only for those same people to forsake the God who has blessed them and turn after the things of this world.

All that we will be reading and preaching on over the next 8 weeks will have one theme and that theme is PREPARE YOURSELF! PREPARE FOR JUDGMENT AND PREPARE FOR THE SAVIOR WHO WILL COME to rescue us from our sin. It would take hundreds of years of teaching for people to be ready because there have been hundreds of years of disobedience leading them to this point. During the rest of our time in the Old Testament we will see God use a series of prophets and key leaders to call His people back to Himself by warning them of the pending judgment that awaits them if they do not turn away from their sin and turn back to Him. And one of those who is called to perform this ministry is the Prophet Isaiah. I want to introduce you to a man who was not only a mouthpiece for God but even he himself had to first have an encounter with God to change the trajectory of his own life. And my prayer today is that we would all have this same encounter. So if you will find **Isaiah 6** I will **PRAY** for us and we will dive in.

Before we get into **Isaiah 6** let me first set the context for us. Isaiah served as a prophet to the Kingdom of Judah (the Southern Kingdom) for 53 years. He began his ministry a little over 120 years after the Prophet Elijah and less than 50 years after the Prophet Jonah. All in all, when we reach the book of Isaiah it will have been 200 years since the division of the nation into two kingdoms and it is going to be another 700 years plus before the arrival of Jesus.

Isaiah's ministry takes place during the reigns of 4 kings of Judah namely Uzziah (who is also referred to as Azariah in 2 Kings), Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. During the time of his ministry he witnessed the fall of the Kingdom of Israel (the Northern Kingdom) into the hands of the Assyrians and the word on the street was that unless Judah turned back to God, they were to be next. Isaiah obviously came from a family of influence because he had easy access to the king and also had a close relationship with a priest. Isaiah begins his ministry in a time very much like what we saw last week with Jonah.

It was a time of prosperity where Judah had enjoyed a strong economy and great military strength. But just like with Solomon's and Jeroboam the II's reign, times of prosperity and security usually lead to spiritual decay and the same was true in Judah under king Uzziah. We need to be aware of the fact that we are all prone to wander spiritually when it comes to times of great prosperity.

I have witnessed this temptation in my own life and you probably have as well. Nothing can quench our thirst for God quicker than being comfortable. However, if we do allow prosperity to make us apathetic toward God then we can expect Him to send times of famine and hardship to get our attention and that is basically what we are going to see over the course of this section. So, what was it that grabbed Isaiah's attention?

What led him to dedicate his life to being probably one of the most unpopular persons at the party, a prophet of God? Why take on such a task with such personal cost and what was so important that he would dedicate the rest of his life to it? The short answer is, **Isaiah met GOD!** And when you meet HIM personally you cannot remain the same! You cannot continue with business as usual. **So, with the time we have remaining I want us to look at three results of what happens when we meet God personally.**

ISAIAH 6:1-4 (NIV) **1** 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. **2** 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. **3** And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." **4** At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

Result #1 - If you meet God personally you will discover is His HOLINESS

He is unlike anything else you will ever experience! He is unlike anyone else you will ever meet. He is perfect in every way. Perfect in majesty, perfect in authority, and perfect in glory. This is signified by the way Isaiah describes what he sees and hears. In fact the seraphim (heavenly beings) which are in and of themselves glorious are saying to one another that He (GOD) is thrice "holy" with the idea being that just one "holy" does not do Him justice. He is Holy, Holy, Holy with the number 3 being a number indicating perfection! He is not just any Lord, He is the Lord Almighty which means in the realms of authority there is no one like Him in all the universe and His authority is unrivaled! So awesome is the glory of His presence, it fills the whole earth.

The sight of what he saw and heard in that moment was as terrifying and unsettling as it was glorious and awesome. The only things I can relate to that have the combination of both terrifying and unsettling coupled with glorious and awesome are a raging fire or an intense and awesome thunderstorm. And as we look through the scripture it is amazing how often we find one of these two ways being used to describe what it is like to encounter the presence of God.

First, we have the many references to **FIRE**:

Hebrews 12:29 refers to our God as a **"consuming fire"**

Luke 3:16 John the Baptist tells the people that Jesus, when he is revealed, will “*baptize them with the Holy Spirit and with fire*” for those who will receive Him. Fire being a symbol of purification.

Jeremiah 20:9 describes God’s word like a “*burning fire shut up in his bones*” compelling him to obey Him and serve Him. Just like we have a hard time containing a fire we will have a hard time containing the word of God.

1 Corinthians 3:11-15 Paul reminds the Corinthians that God will “*test our works by fire*” to see if it is genuine and real.

Exodus 3:2 tells us that when God appeared to Moses He did so in a “*burning bush*”. For Moses it was both an awesome and terrifying site.

Exodus 40:38 describes God’s presence with Israel which was demonstrated with a “*pillar of fire*” that was on the tabernacle during the night.

Then we have the many references to **THUNDER**:

Job uses THUNDER to describes what it is like to hear God’s voice. **Job 37:2-5 (NIV)** “*At this my heart pounds and leaps from its place. 2 Listen! Listen to the roar of his voice, to the rumbling that comes from his mouth. 3 He unleashes his lightning beneath the whole heaven and sends it to the ends of the earth. 4 After that comes the sound of his roar; he thunders with his majestic voice. When his voice resounds, he holds nothing back. 5 God’s voice thunders in marvelous ways; he does great things beyond our understanding.*”

Samuel uses THUNDER to describes God’s response to our sin. **1 Samuel 2:10 (NIV)** those who oppose the Lord will be broken. The Most High will thunder from heaven; the Lord will judge the ends of the earth. “*He will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed.*”

David uses THUNDER as a description of God speaking to him. **Psalms 29:3-8 (NIV)** The voice of the Lord is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the Lord thunders over the mighty waters. **4** The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is majestic. **5** The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars; the Lord breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon. **6** He makes Lebanon leap like a calf Sirion like a young wild ox. **7** The voice of the Lord strikes with flashes of lightning. **8** The voice of the Lord shakes the desert, the Lord shakes the Desert of Kadesh.

These kinds of encounters invoke a response! You can’t be ho-hum or blow this off as no big deal. It rocks you to your core. It causes the hairs on your arms to rise up. It brings with it a rush of adrenalin for you are not certain as to whether you will live or die. It touches all of your being to the core and it causes you to contemplate a decision. You can’t be neutral or remain idle.

For you are experiencing the presence of God as He is choosing to reveal Himself to you. (Btw, you can’t manufacture this. You can’t control it. But you can SEEK it and you can LONG for it! And if you do He will show it to you.) But if you meet God you can’t stay as you are now and neither could Isaiah. Notice his response.

Isaiah 6:5-7 (NIV) **5** “*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.*” **6** Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from

the altar. **7** With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."

Result #2 - If you meet God personally you will acknowledge your SINFULNESS

There really is no choice. In the presence of God sin becomes obvious. Our low estate in comparison with His majesty is like a wine stain on a wedding dress. You notice the stain! There really is no comparison between us and Him. In fact, unless you allow your sin to be addressed you will not want to remain in His presence for very long because the glory of His holy light will expose every nook and cranny where you might want to hide your sin.

Imagine a light so glorious there are no shadows! That is what it is like in His presence. There is no place to hide or run to. No shadows to hide in from the purifying light of His truth. So Isaiah does what God wants all of us to do. Confess your sin! Be real and transparent. The reality is He already sees it and knows it anyway.

He just wants us to acknowledge it so that He can cleanse us from it so we can remain in His presence. **Did you hear that? God wants you in His presence!** He wants you near Him! He doesn't want to send you away and He doesn't want you to leave. He wants to purge you. To cleanse you! To make you whole!

1 John 1:5-10 (NIV) 5 This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. **6** If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. **7** But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. **8** If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. **9** If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. **10** If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

Notice what the angel does! He takes a hot coal from the altar and uses it to purge the sin from Isaiah's life and declares him cleansed. This is what Jesus does for us. He takes his blood shed on the altar of God and applies it to the sin hanging over our lives in order to purge us and cleanse us.

But notice that we must first confess our sins with the desire that we don't want to stay the way we are but that we want to live a life now set apart to God. This was Isaiah's desire. And if you meet God this should be your desire. So if this is what it looks like to meet God, what should be our response if we do? Notice what Isaiah's response was.

Isaiah 6:8 (NIV) 8 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!"

Result #3 - If you meet God personally you will have a desire to declare Him to OTHERS UNCONDITIONALLY

Once Isaiah experienced God's holiness coupled with God's grace it compelled him to want to tell others about God. Therefore when God asks the question, "Who will go for us?" Isaiah

responded with, "Here am I. Send me!" If you have tasted the goodness of God and experienced His guilt free forgiveness and freedom then why wouldn't you want to sign up for this calling? You and I should be compelled to **GO and TELL** others of what God has done for us.

Listen to the words of David after he dealt with his own sin and experienced God's grace and forgiveness. **Psalm 51:12-13 (NIV)** "12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. 13 Then I will teach transgressors your ways, so that sinners will turn back to you." -

We should have a desire to allow God to use us to declare this message of hope to all who need to hear it. The problem is though, before we can get to God's benefit for our life we must come to grips with the part which is keeping us from God - our sin. And unfortunately, there are some who will not want to deal with that fact. God basically points that out in the next verse.

Isaiah 6:9-10 (NIV) 9 He said, "Go and tell this people: "Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.' 10 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."

Most of Isaiah's ministry will be to warn his people of God's pending judgment regarding their sin and to call his people to change. But God lets him know up front that there will be many who will only harden their hearts toward God and no matter what he says they will not hear him. And isn't this the reason why most of us remain silent when it comes to God?

We feel the rejection and it is uncomfortable. I don't know about you but I don't want to be the one to push people further away from God than they already are. But here is the thing, the preaching of the Gospel or calling people to address their sin with God and change course is in and of itself an act of GRACE. God's warning as to what is to come is an act of grace as we saw last week with Jonah and Nineveh. In fact, Paul reminds us in Romans 10 that without the preacher or the witness how will they ever have an opportunity to believe?

Romans 10:14-15 (NIV) How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? 15 And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

But if so many will reject us then why continue? Why say yes? Can't we just move on with our lives and worship God privately and let what is going to come, come? **The answer is why would we? We continue for the sake of those who will change as a result of our faithfulness in proclaiming.** God calls us to love people. How can we honestly say we love people if we don't share the gospel with them?

There is potential energy within the Gospel Seed of grace and repentance. Whenever the word of God is proclaimed it is an opportunity for a lost person to become a found person. It is like a seed. In it is the potential for life but it still must be planted. If you have benefited from grace why would you not want others to have a chance at that grace as well. **We experience grace.**

But when we are selfish with its beauty it's a treasure we hide without permission. Our work is not done until judgment day finally comes. This is God's grace. He wants everyone to have ample opportunity to hear and respond to His message of forgiveness before He brings His judgment.

Isaiah 6:11-13 (NIV) 11 Then I said, "For how long, Lord?" And he answered: "Until the cities lie ruined and without inhabitant, until the houses are left deserted and the fields ruined and ravaged, **12** until the Lord has sent everyone far away and the land is utterly forsaken. **13** And though a tenth remains in the land, it will again be laid waste. But as the terebinth and oak leave stumps when they are cut down, so the holy seed will be the stump in the land."

Isaiah's work was to continue until God fulfilled all that He said he would do regarding the judgment of Israel and Judah's sin. Even once all was finished God still promised there would be a remnant that would come out of this. Those who would heed the warning and receive the hope God is offering. A "holy seed" that would carry on and ultimately lead to the Messiah Jesus Christ! This "holy seed" as we will see will be those God will spare and take captive to Babylon. They will one day return and rebuild Israel in preparation for the Messiah Jesus Christ as we will see in the coming weeks. You see, God's work is not done until Jesus comes!

For Isaiah it was in preparation for the first coming of Christ. For us it is in preparation for His second coming when He will bring judgment on the whole earth. Until then, we are to proclaim and plant seed until He does because we should want everyone to know and have a chance to receive GRACE. Many will harden their hearts but they will not be able to say grace wasn't offered them. There will be those who will and they will be the seeds that sprouted up into life that we planted.

The reality for all of us is that we will meet Him one day! The question is what will that day be like? Will we meet Him as our SAVIOR and KING or will we meet Him as our JUDGE?

Revelation 20:11-15 (NIV) 11 Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. **12** And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. **13** The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done. **14** Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. **15** Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

Worship Team Comes Back Up

Invitation:

You see, when it comes to encountering God it is a posture of your heart, not just an offering of praise on your lips. We see in the Gospels that the people when they encountered Jesus they marveled at Jesus, they were amazed at His words and they were overwhelmed by His teaching.

When was the last time you marveled over Jesus and His HOLINESS?

Has your encounter with Jesus caused you to deal with your SIN?

Do you have a desire to declare Him to OTHERS?

You may try to avoid God but eventually you will have to face Him! You may feel unworthy but know this, He wants you to draw near!

Will you meet Jesus today and let Him transform your life?