

Worship
(Isaiah 6 vs 1-8 John 1 vs 29-36)

Over 700 years BC Isaiah was concerned about the state of his nation. King Uzziah had reigned with integrity in Judah for over 50 years but he had just died and a change of leadership can be unsettling. However, as Isaiah worshipped in the Temple that day his mind was lifted to take in a far bigger picture and his heart motivated to work to a far greater agenda. His experience is recorded in Isaiah ch6.

He is granted a vision of God enthroned in heavenly majesty. Human leaders may come and go but God is alive and well, dependable as ever and still very much on the throne of His universe! The whole earth seems unable to contain His glory. The large Temple area is hardly enough for just the train of His robe. So His dominion is vast and all-encompassing. He is attended by angelic beings, 'seraphim', literally 'burning ones' who fill the temple with smoke and whose voices are like thunder as they cry out, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory.'

The most powerful angels shield their eyes in reverent fear in the presence of the Lord. How much more reverence should we show as imperfect human beings? Isn't it interesting the angels don't cry, 'Powerful, powerful, powerful is the Lord', or 'Loving, loving, loving is the Lord'? We might prefer that but no, they cry, 'Holy'. Separate. Different. Pure. In the light of which Isaiah is crushed with a sense of embarrassment and shame. 'I'm *unholy*. We all are!'

This is why when we gather on a Sunday one of the first things we say after welcoming people is, 'Let us worship God.' Of course we have our earthly concerns but let's raise our minds and hearts above these to the Lord as He has revealed Himself in His Word. Let's focus on the One Who reigns over all our concerns, over everything. Our Maker and our Judge.

As we do we rightly feel the need, like Isaiah, to confess our sense of unworthiness. Whether it's a Presbyterian service, or Anglican or Roman Catholic you'll normally find near the start a prayer of confession, an opportunity to express our repentance and seek God's mercy.

So Christian worship begins with God revealing Himself in Scripture. We join the angels in praising Him, declaring His greatness. But **His holiness prompts conviction**. Our consciences are seized and vexed over our sinful failure and disobedience. We and our people are guilty and deserve not blessing but righteous anger and punishment! None of us like admitting these things but it is necessary, as is repentance, turning away from wrongdoing.

And now we find just as God's holiness prompts conviction about sin, **His grace provides atonement** to cover it! From the altar of sacrifice a live coal is given to cleanse Isaiah from guilt.

Atonement is provided, that means someone else pays to make up for our crimes. For centuries since the time of Moses Israel had been used with the principle of 'a life for a life' and the practice of sacrificing a substitute. An animal was offered up in place of the guilty person.

Now Christians read the Old Testament in the light of the New Testament. Sometimes called 'the Lamb of God', Jesus was given to the world to be our sacrifice of atonement. On the cross He suffered in our place and took our guilt away. Humble worshippers who trust in Him are assured of forgiveness.

This is why we talk so much in church about Jesus and the cross. If all we did was wag the finger at people and criticise folk for their sin we'd be no better than the Pharisees. Our religion would be miserable indeed! But we have this good news of God's grace to celebrate and declare. So we sing songs which speak of Him, we read the Bible and talk of what Jesus has done, to understand these truths better and be assured that God's saving grace actually applies to us.

But this is where we must be careful.

God's holiness prompts conviction and His grace provides atonement but that doesn't mean everyone is automatically saved and goes to heaven. We must not take grace for granted and carry on living to just please ourselves. If our sin cost Jesus the dreadful suffering on the cross, we don't want to sin anymore! We will turn from all God says is wrong. We will humble ourselves and ask Jesus to be *our* Saviour, to save and forgive *us*. With the help of His Spirit we will seek to overcome temptation and live first and foremost to please and honour Him.

Here we see that **salvation produces grateful service**. God's grace is free but it calls out for a response! 'Here am I.' said Isaiah, 'Send me.' Even though the people would frequently ignore his preaching. Even though in the end it would bring him a martyr's death. He would answer God's call.

This is expressed in our Sunday gatherings as we offer thanks and praise in our hymns and prayers, as we bring gifts and offer ourselves in service in response to the grace of our Lord and Saviour. Here *we* are Lord. Send *us*! We know there will be challenges but take us and use us to be your witnesses and build your church here and worldwide.

Today's reading from Isaiah helps us see how the Gospel is to be the pattern for every worship gathering, what we are to be about if we call ourselves Christians. It begins with God as He is revealed by the Holy Spirit in Scripture. His holiness prompts conviction of sin but His grace provides atonement. God's offer of mercy and new life is proclaimed. It is for us to receive His grace with thanks and allow salvation to produce in us lives of willing service.

For His glory!