

## “The Heart of Worship: Holiness” (Week 1) (Isaiah 6:1-8)

- **In Spirit and Truth**

- How many of you know this song: “*I’m coming back to the heart of worship, and it’s all about you, it’s all about you Jesus...*”? Have you ever heard the story behind it? In the late 90’s (aka the glory days!) a young worship leader named *Matt Redman* was serving an Anglican Church in Watford, England. They had a dynamic ministry that was becoming a *movement*. But one day they made a radical decision to strip their services of *music* for an entire season. For a time, they showed up with just their Bibles and their voices, nothing else. Matt didn’t know what to do—he thought he was out of a job! His songs have been sung all over the world: *Blessed Be Your Name, Better is One Day, 10,000 Reasons*. And during that season, he wrote a song called “The Heart of Worship” which he thought was just a personal song for him, but it became an anthem for a generation. The verse goes: **“When the music fades, all is stripped away and I simply come, longing just to bring something that’s of worth, that will bless your heart. I’ll bring you more than a song, for a song in itself is not what you have required. You search much deeper within, through the way things appear, you’re looking into my heart.”** For a time, that church had to *forget about the music* so that they could *remember what the music was for*.
  - You’ll be glad to know that we’re *not* getting rid of music this month—as you noticed already! But we *are* trying some different rhythms together in our praise, because even when we’re at our best, and even when we “get it,” we still need the reminders every week, every season, of *why we do what we do*, and *who we’re doing it for* (I know I do!). And just as we tried to “reset” in the Advent season, a New Year is a great time to remember and refresh “The Heart of Worship.”
- There are lots of Scriptures that speak to the heart of worship, but one of the greatest comes in John 4. Jesus is having a conversation with a Samaritan woman at a well, and in the midst of their dialogue about whether Jews or Samaritans have the right understanding of worship, he says, **“...a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in**

***truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.” (4:23-24)***

- We’re going to cover lots of themes in this series, but my hope is that it will help us become the *true worshippers* Jesus said the Father is looking for—worshiping in Spirit and in truth. *Worshiping in Spirit* means having an *authentic connection* with God: we’re not just “talking about God” but we’re engaging His presence. It’s not about entertainment, it’s about *encounter*. *Worshiping in Truth* means worshiping God *as He truly is*: we’re not just projecting our own agendas or putting ourselves in the center, but we’re responding to who God is.
- That’s our focus today. If we want to orient ourselves to the heart of worship, the best place to begin is the theme of **holiness**. *God’s holiness*. And one of the best Scriptures about encountering God’s holiness is in Isaiah. First, *let’s pause and pray*.

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- **The Throne Room**
  - Isaiah is a major prophet in the Old Testament who ministered in the time leading up to Israel’s Exile. In Ch. 6, he shares this incredible vision where he found himself standing in God’s heavenly temple, His throne room. Let’s open up and try to see what he saw. It starts like this.
  - **“In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord...” (6:1)** Full-stop. Think of the weight of those words. How many people can say that? How many characters in the Bible could actually say, *I saw the Lord*? Throughout the Old Testament people believed that if they actually saw the Lord *they wouldn’t survive the encounter!* God is so great, so holy, so powerful, that if we in our frail, fallen nature behold the fullness of His presence, we couldn’t handle it, we’d be finished! But Isaiah says, *I saw the Lord*. So, what did he see? Listen to how he describes the vision:
    - **“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. 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. And they were calling to one another: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.’ At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.” (6:1-4)**
      - God reveals Himself to Isaiah as *the high and exalted One*, the great king—the King of all kings, the Holy One. His throne is unmatched, His royal robe is so vast it fills the room. All other rulers, all other thrones, are just little derivatives of this Ultimate Power who created the whole Universe, who was and is and is to come. It’s one thing to *know this*, the “idea” of God—but to *see Him*, to *encounter Him*, like this—what would that be like?
      - Isaiah also sees angelic beings around the throne—*seraphim*. We don’t know much about them, but according to Hebrew understanding, seraphs would be the highest class of heavenly creatures, because they’re closest to God’s presence, part of the “inner circle” of attendants around His throne. Fittingly, the word

seraphim means “burning ones” or “fiery ones”—afire with God’s glory, passionately adoring His presence without ceasing. Isaiah notices that they’re covering their faces, as if to say, “We can’t even look at His glory up close like this,” and covering their feet as if to say, “We can’t even stand in His presence.” They’re calling to one another, “Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord Almighty,” with such mighty voices of praise that Isaiah feels it like an earthquake beneath his feet.

- Consider the worship of these “burning ones” who are *closest* in proximity to God’s Throne: what words do they use to describe to one another their experience of God’s presence? *Holy, holy, holy—the infinite holiness of God* is what these angels are marveling at, for endless generations, around His Throne. The word *holy* means “set apart”—because the Lord Almighty *stands alone, there is no one like Him!* He is the *only one*, there is no equal, no other—He is the one Cause, everything else is just effect. He is the One Creator, everything else is just creature. He is the One True God, everything else is an idol. Can you imagine staring into that glory *face to face?* *Holy, Holy, Holy.* Now, how is little old Isaiah going to respond to this?
- **“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.’” (6:5)**
  - Isaiah is a holy man of Israel, one of the greatest prophets, and yet when he sees God, he says, *Woe to me, I am undone!* He sees that even highest angels cover their faces before God, *but here he is, beholding the King of glory!* What else could you do except fall on your face and pray for mercy? In our fallen condition, we can walk around in blindness: we think sin is just not a big deal, we think we’re just “ok.” But once we glimpse who He is, once you see the magnitude of His holiness—that’s when you realize the magnitude of your sin, the distance between you and Him, and your powerlessness to change it. Now watch what God does.
- **“Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, ‘See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.’” (6:6-7)**

- Isaiah sees God’s holiness and his response is, *I don’t belong here, I’m a sinful man from a sinful people, I’m not going to survive this.* And God says, *I know; now let me take care of it.* Isaiah could only glimpse from far off God’s promise of redemption that would come with Christ. But here he gets to taste that redemption, he gets to experience how God’s power can transform us. You see, one of the reasons the angels can’t stop singing, *holy, holy, holy* is because the vastness of God’s glory is matched by the greatness of His love and mercy. **His love is holy, His love set apart, there is no love like the love of God!** His holiness is so great, it can either destroy us, or transform us—it all depends on how we respond to Him. When God offers us His presence, His saving grace, will we choose repentance, or rejection?
- **Taming the God of Mind-blowing Holiness**
  - When we come to worship the Lord, do we ever forget that *this* is the God we worship? Do we forget how *wholly other* He is, how set apart, how majestic, how awe-some? Do we take for granted that He descended to our dust and shed His blood so that we could freely walk into His presence and stand *where angels fear to tread*? **We need to wake up to the Holiness of God again and come back to the heart of worship.**
  - Worship involves many things, which we’ll talk about in this whole series. But above all, Worship should be a regular reminder that the God we serve is so Holy that even a glimpse of His presence will utterly blow our minds. We have to realize that the things we do in worship *are just signs pointing to the Main Thing, pointing to Him!* **When we dwell on the performance, the mechanics, and that’s all we focus on, we are completely missing the point!**
  - It’s like when you’re training your dog to fetch, and you’re trying to point them to the thing you want them to get, but all they do is *stare at your finger.* Or like, going to visit the Grand Canyon, and you drive up to the sign that says, “Grand Canyon This Way,” and you get out and look at that sign and take pictures in front of it—and then you just drive home *without actually going to see the Grand Canyon!* That’s us when we come together to worship and all we can think about is: *those people made me feel good, that worship team sounded so great, that pastor is*

*such a nice guy. No! That's just staring at the finger instead of what it's pointing to; that's stopping at the sign and missing the Grand Canyon! We come together to worship the Lord Almighty, High and Exalted, the Holy One—His love is so great that He stepped down from His Throne to save us so that our sin would not have to separate us anymore. We come to seek Him, to behold Him, to know Him, to let Him have His way, to exalt Him, because He is worthy of it all!*

- **The heart of worship is Him. It will only ever be Him. Forever.** This table of grace reminds us that His body was broken, and His blood was shed, to make us holy as He is holy, so we can now worship Him along with those angels. Do you want to know Him more today? Do you want to come and bow before Him? Do you want to come back to the heart of it all and give Him your all? Now is the time. Let us worship Him Church, let us worship.