

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.

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.”

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!” (Isaiah 6:1-8 NIV2011)

Know Your Place

It was the best of times it was the worst of times. It was a time of peace and prosperity. Things were going well. Some things could have been better. But, overall, it was good. King Uzziah had built up an army and a reputation to go along with it. For 52 years he had been **“the guy.”** No one was more powerful in the land and his fame spread far and wide. But, as they say, all good things must come to an end. Even the great and powerful succumb to death. Judah, the nation, would never revive that glory again.

It’s at this point in history—in the year King Uzziah dies—when Isaiah saw it. No matter how great, grand, and glorious King Uzziah was, it would not prepare Isaiah. Isaiah looks; there he sits on his throne high and lifted up. The train of his robe fills the temple. There’s no question he belongs. What does he look like? The apostle John would see a similar vision in Revelation when he falls at his feet as though dead (Rev. 1:17). There John sees one whose head and hair is white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. Whatever Isaiah sees, it strikes him in a similar way.

As Isaiah looks up to this glorious throne, there above him and the throne are seraphim—a certain class of angels—flying, soaring back and forth above the throne. This aren’t the cute Cupids you see on Valentine’s Day with cheery smiles and rosy cheeks. That word “seraphim” describes them as “fiery ones.” These burning creatures have six wings: two cover their faces, two cover their feet, and with two they are flying. You might recall elsewhere in the Bible how humans react when they meet angels.

These holy creatures who stand in the presence of God and do his bidding force humans to see how small they really are. It's truly a terrifying experience.

What a sight that had to have been for Isaiah! Put yourself there in that place. He's in the presence of burning angels soaring back and forth, over and above, staring up at this powerful throne when he hears: "**Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.**" Calling back and forth the angels repeat again and again...Holy, holy holy! The very door posts shake. Smoke fills the temple. Isaiah is in the presence of the Lord of armies! Nothing can contain him. Nothing can compare to him. Holy—the Lord is separate from all else. He is completely independent of everyone and everything. Holy—He is set apart from the rest. His magnitude and greatness are things our human minds cannot comprehend. Holy—spotless, blameless, pure, perfect and good. Even the angels themselves must cover their feet and faces in the presence of the three persons-in-one, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Triune God. It's a mystery. He is holy.

What could Isaiah possibly do? "**Woe to me!**" he says, "**I am ruined! 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.**" God had warned his people that no one can look on him and live. Now here is Isaiah, in the presence of the Holy One, the Lord Almighty, whose glory fills the whole earth. There's no begging for mercy from Isaiah's lips. Begging has the idea that there's still a chance. Isaiah knows better. He's a dead man walking; as good as dead.

Isaiah knows his place; do you? Here we are in the presence of the Holy One, the Lord Almighty. We set before his altar and his throne where He still sits with the burning ones soaring over him. With the train of his robe, his glory continues to fill the whole earth. How could we ever think we could keep any secret thoughts away from him? There's nowhere I can go on this earth and not be in the presence of his glory. Woe to me for my unclean lips that one moment speak his praise and the next say such hurtful, impatient things about other people. Woe to me whose unclean lips whine and complain and grumble when things don't turn out the way I want. Woe to me who speaks about needing to trust God, claims that I trust God, but...And then dare to give him advice of what He should do. Woe to me who says the right things but my actions say something different. I am ruined with these unclean lips that promise to do so much and have good intentions to do even more, but then fail to follow through with it. To think, I dare to stand in his presence today with my bad attitude, selfish heart, and sinful-self-seeking motivation. If I may be so bold, I think you can relate.

On top of it all, we live among people of unclean lips. Instead of lessening our guilt, it compounds it. It's not, "It's their life. Let them do what they want with it." No, their shame and their guilt splashes onto us when we have kept quiet. We haven't done nearly

enough of using our lips for good. Instead, we join in with the unclean speech of this world and speak with similar actions.

As Isaiah sees that throne, watches the seraphim flying, hears their calling out, and knows that he is ruined, one of the seraphim flies to the altar. He takes a pair of tongs, pulls out a live, burning coal, and taking it into his hand the angel touches Isaiah's mouth. I wonder if at this point Isaiah thought it was the end. Instead Isaiah hears, **“See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.”**

The patient hears, “The cancer is in remission.” The parents who've experienced miscarriages and struggling to have kids hear those first cries and doctor say, “It's a girl.” Life is a mess, it's your fault, you are sure this relationship will be ruined, you hear, “I forgive you.” You didn't realize the tension you were holding onto, the weight you had been carrying on your shoulders, you didn't realize it until it was gone. What relief. Isaiah knew he could nothing in the presence of the Holy One. Terror struck his heart. Imminent doom and destruction was all he could see. Then he hears from the Lord's servant, “Your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.” What relief.

You said it earlier today: “I am by nature sinful. I have done evil and failed to do what is good. I deserve your wrath and punishment now and eternity.” That God does not turn us into dust for coming into his presence is a miracle in itself. Instead of striking you down with holy fire, you heard through his servant, “All your sins are forgiven. Your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.”

Why? The Father saw our wretched state. You confessing your sin isn't unveiling this big secret before God doing him a big favor. Confession is for your sake. The Father was well aware all was ruined. But instead of wiping the slate clean and starting over, the Father loves this world and the people in it. A promise is made and the Son responds, “Send me to save them!”

And so when the time is right the Father shows his love in this way: he gives his one and only Son. Jesus who is higher than the angels takes on our flesh and blood. His Son, true God from eternity, sees how our sins have set us apart from God. He sees how sin has ruined you. That sin could not be ignored. He couldn't act like he never heard what comes from our unclean lips. Sin must be paid for. And the Son says, “I'll do it. I know that suffering has to take place. I know the price is high. But it's worth it. To save a life, life must be given!”

Jesus knows his place is to take your place. And so he goes to the altar of the cross to pay the price with his holy and precious blood. That's why he came. Your guilt was taken from you and laid on the Son. You hear the Son cry out as his Father punishes him instead of you, “My God, why have you forsaken me!” You hear his suffering is real suffering while the Old Testament promises are being fulfilled when he says, “I thirst.”

You know he pays your entire debt when he says, "It is finished." And if there was any thought that there is something more you need to do, a little extra tip you need throw in to cover yourself, something you need to pay to show his love can still be yours, the Father raises his Son three days later. Jesus lives. Therefore let there be no doubt in your mind, "Your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."

But we are born creatures of flesh; by nature dead in sin. So the Son returns to the Father to send the Spirit that we might be born again. Through the water and the Spirit in Holy Baptism you have been adopted into God's family. The triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit put their claim on you that you might call God, "Abba, Father." Before the Father and Son the Holy Spirit himself testifies about you: "You are holy. You are apart from this sinful world. You are God's child. That makes Jesus your brother which means that you are co-heirs of God's kingdom. Know your place is with him."

He doesn't cast you out of his presence or burn you with holy fire, but invites you to him. He doesn't send an angel from heaven with a living coal in his hand. From the altar of the cross He comes with His Living Word spoken into your ears and onto your hearts. He touches your lips with bread and wine, Jesus' body and blood given and poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Know your place is here, in God's house with him, with your brothers and sisters in Christ, where God comes to you in Word and Sacrament.

Now what? Now that God has taken your guilt away. Now that your sins are atoned for. Now that your place is with him, what are we to do? God brings you in to send you out. Who shall God send? After all that God has done for me, send me. Not out of coercion, arm-twisting obligation or because I have to, but send me as a dad so that my children might learn to know their heavenly Father's patient love. Send me as husband to my wife so she might know Jesus' forgiving love. Send me out as brother to my brother and sisters in Christ so they might know Jesus' companionship and support through me. Will I do it perfectly? By no means. Even that is forgiven too. But Jesus works through me to point people back to him. He does the same with your hands and with your mouth. With you as mom, wife, grandma, grandpa, rancher, shut-in, retired, care-giver, friend, the three-in-one, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit has set you in that place. We pray, "Lord, work in our hearts to know our place and send me to share you." Amen.