

In Mark Buchanan's book called *Things Unseen*, he talks about those longings we can't quite label ... it's like a homesickness. He asks the question: What if all our wanting is for something earth doesn't have? What if our addictions and our debt and our serial relationships are all about this yearning for God, even when we don't realize that's what we're after? What if the answer to our brokenness is God's holiness? And it's not just some mental idea of God we're after. It's an encounter. We want to encounter God. But there is a difference between an encounter with the real, living God and the Jesus of our imagination. An authentic encounter will leave us changed. It may even leave us with a limp, as we learned last week ... but at least it will be a God-given limp.

I want to ask you to find a piece of paper and write this question: What do I want? And then I want you to write down these four phrases: God's holiness, My sinfulness, God's grace, My destiny.

Those four phrases are the pieces of Isaiah's encounter with God. It happened the year King Uzziah died, which would have been about 750 B.C. Uzziah ruled Israel for 52 years, over what is probably the longest season of prosperity in Israel's history. So for him to die was a big deal. Israel had a bad track record with kings. They'd had so many bad kings over the generations ... so King Uzziah was pretty special. When he died, everyone wondered ... what would happen to Israel and who would rule God's people? Would the next king love God?

Isaiah was a friend of the king, so he grieved both for himself and for Israel. And he had all these questions about what would happen next. That's where his spirit was when he went to the temple to worship God one day. He needed God to be God for him and for his nation ... and here's what happened.

Isaiah 6:1-4 says - *In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. 2 Above him were seraphs (that is a kind of angel ... their name literally means “burning ones.” They are these angels ... their whole job is to worship God ... and they have so much energy for God that it looks like they are on fire), 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.*

**Isaiah came face to face with God’s great holiness.** He goes into the temple with this heavy heart and all these questions and God’s answer is to reveal His holiness. His pure holiness. Isaiah finds himself in the presence of pure love, unmerited grace and this incredible healing power ... and he is overwhelmed. For the first time in his life, he sees himself as he is because he sees himself in light of God’s holiness.

Here’s the problem with us. We tend to base our worth and our value on how we stack up to other people. We are constantly comparing ourselves to others. We do it at work. We do it on the beach. We do it with the models in the magazines. We look at the other person and at their life and we wonder why they have it so much better than us. OR ... we compare and say, “Yeah, I may not be perfect but at least I’m not as bad as that guy.” Either way, we lose. One makes us a slave to the demon of inadequacy and the other makes us a slave to pride.

And the problem is ... neither of these comparisons is real. I read an article recently about how easy it is for us to cling to our fantasies and ignore reality. The guy was actually talking about a particular pastor’s struggle with porn. This guy had a huge revelation one day ... that he was

attracted to these images because they are not real. “The women in the pictures never had bad days, were never crabby and demanding, never disrespectful and demeaning. No mood swings. They always suited his mood, his needs, his wants. They were unreal.” But what got him when he had this revelation was coming to see that he had no actual relationship with these women whatever. “If (he named a female celebrity) had sat down next to him in an airplane, she wouldn't know him from Adam. And he might not even know her. Thanks to computer graphics, what he sees may have only the slightest resemblance to any actual human.

So often, we're comparing ourselves to lives we know nothing about ... to a two-dimensional version of a three-dimensional person. No wonder we can't compete. No one can compete with a fantasy. Steve usually talks about this in terms of slugs. He talks about these two slugs who are inching their way across the pavement and maybe one slug is a half-inch further along than the other slug and maybe he's feeling pretty good about that and maybe the slower slug is feeling pretty bad about his progress. But from God's perspective ... they are both just slugs. And we are those slugs.

Listen: If you are looking for an accurate gauge of who you are, don't compare yourself to another slug. Compare yourself to God. When was the last time you allowed yourself enough imagination to stand in awe of the Great Redeemer? When was the last time you let worship take you to your very core, and to your deepest need? Isaiah saw God as He was, and it caused Isaiah to see himself as he was, too. God's holiness is the answer to our brokenness.

**When Isaiah saw himself in relation to God, he came face to face with his own great sinfulness.** Isaiah 6:5 says - *“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.”* The moment Isaiah saw God as He really was, he saw himself as he actually was.

Peter had an experience just like this. He was with Jesus out in the boat one day ... it was before he knew who Jesus was ... before he was following him. And Jesus told Peter to go out into deeper waters, then let his nets down for a catch. Simon was a professional fisherman, and he'd been out there all night and he knew that what Jesus was telling him didn't make sense. But he did it ... and when they let down their nets they caught more fish than they could pull up. And Luke 5:8 says, “When Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, ‘Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!’”

How long has it been since you've had that kind of revelation? Maybe its time for that kind of encounter with Jesus. Because maybe you have a root of bitterness or a root of rejection or a root of anger or a root of unforgiveness or a root of racism or pride or fear ...

And you're keeping it alive by keeping it on the horizontal. You justify those feelings with things like, ‘Well, if they weren't like they are, then I wouldn't be like I am.’”

And what you're missing with that perspective is that the one who is suffering most with that mindset is YOU.

Do you remember Jacob's story? Of how he wrestled with God all night and in that wrestling match, God knocked Jacob's hip out of joint, so for the rest of his life, Jacob walked with a limp. Which is so much what we all worry about when we think about an encounter with Jesus and about confessing these roots in us that are choking the spiritual life out of us.

We don't want to be the one to confess. Isn't that like giving in? Isn't that weak? Maybe I don't want to walk with that kind of limp. But here's the thing: if you're dealing with a sin or a root in your life right now, you're limping NOW. You may not see it, but I guarantee the people around you see it. At least, limping with God has a point to it. Which limp would you rather have? One limp is a disability and the other limp is a blessing. If I have to walk with a limp, I think I would rather walk with a God-given limp.

Listen: As long as you're trying somehow to bend Jesus around your issue, as long as you are treating Jesus as your counselor and not as the Holy One of Israel, you will be a slave to your dysfunction. If you have not yet had an authentic Isaiah experience, you need an Isaiah experience ... not the kind where you make a better excuse for what you're doing, but the kind where you fall down in front of God and say, "I am a sinful man. I am a sinful woman." I believe there are some things that are not going to turn around until you confess some of your stuff. God's holiness is the answer to our brokenness.

This is the good news: God made us and loves us. The bad news is that our sin separates us from God. He still loves us but God is holy. But there is more good news: Jesus spans the gap between our sinfulness and God's holiness. That's what Isaiah encountered.

**Isaiah came face to face with God's great grace.** Isaiah 6:6-7 says - *Then one of the seraphs 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."* This is such a powerful picture of grace. And this isn't the first time God has shown Isaiah what grace looks like. I love the way Isaiah hammers this point home early on in the book. "You want to argue about your sin, my holiness, your redemption?" God says

(Isaiah 1:18). “Come on, I’ll argue it out with you. But the bottom line is this: *no matter how deep the stain of your sins, I can remove it. I can make you as clean as freshly fallen snow. Even if you are stained as red as crimson, I can make you as white as wool.*” That’s what grace looks like when it deals with a life, and that is how God deals with us. God is building the Community of the Rescued not out of fine-looking, well-adjusted people, but out of people in deep need of mercy and grace. We are all in deep need of an Isaiah experience.

The answer to our brokenness is God’s holiness. God’s holiness reveals our sinfulness. God’s grace brings our healing and leads to us into our destiny.

**Isaiah came face to face with his own great destiny.** Isaiah 6:8-10 - *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!”* This is the end game, that we will find our purpose as we come under God’s holiness. We tend to want to flip this equation around. We want our lives in order first, and we want some measure of success *before* we give ourselves to God. So we work hard, making ourselves believe that one day if we work at it hard enough, we’ll earn our significance ... and then maybe we get our own place at the table of holiness. That’s backward.

Destiny comes after repentance. Isaiah shows us that we have to come broken, recognize the depth of our sinfulness, receive (really receive) the grace of God ... and THEN we have ears to hear the purposes of God.

(CINDY COMES) I’m pretty sure that what most of us in this room don’t need this morning is one more reason to feel condemned. We don’t need one more person to tell us what we are not. What we need is for God to tell us who we are.

What most of us do need is an Isaiah experience. We need to encounter ... not with the Jesus of our imagination but with the Holy One ... the one who will send us to our knees. Here's how our response is going to work today. This is all about having an authentic encounter with Jesus. I want to ask you to consider God's holiness, your sinfulness, God's grace, your destiny.

Where are you on that spectrum? What is your deep need? Is it to encounter a Holy God and to see Him for who He is so you can build your faith in Him? Is it to finally acknowledge some part of your own sinfulness that you've been living in denial of? Is it to argue it out with God ... and to finally accept that grace and mercy are how God chooses to deal with even the worst in us? Or maybe you what you really need from God is some sense of what He made you for.

I want to ask you to take a moment now to write your thoughts. What do you want? Do you want an encounter with God? What do you need to confess? This is your time.