

Holy, Holy, Holy

Isaiah 5-6

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The rock band, *The Eagles*, on their final album, *Long Road Out of Eden*, wrote a song called: *Failed Grasp On The Big Picture*. The song is an indictment of American culture for its indulgence of entertainment, money, sex, and misplaced faith in politics.

Here are a few of the verses:

*You my love-drunk friend
All that red wine and candlelight
Soulful conversations
That go on until the dawn*

*How many times can you tell your story?
How many hangovers can you endure
Just to get some snogging done?*

*You're living in a hormone dream
You don't have the slightest notion
What long-term love is all about*

*All your romantic liaisons
Don't deal with eternal questions like:
Who left the cap off the . . . toothpaste?
Whose turn to take the garbage out?*

*And the right will prevail
All our troubles shall be resolved
We hold faith above all
Unless there's money or sex involved*

*Frail grasp on the big picture
Nobody's calling them for roughing up the kicker
It's a frail grasp on the big picture
Heaven help us¹*

If you listen to the song, you might think the Eagles were inspired by Isaiah 5 because Isaiah 5:1-7 is a song that indicts Judah for many of these same sins. Yahweh said this song was a love song, but it turns out to be a lament and an indictment of Judah's unfaithfulness to Him.

¹ Writer(s): Frey Glenn Lewis, Henley Donald Hugh, Smith Steuart; Eagles 2007 album: *Long Road Out of Eden*; <https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/eagles/frailgrasponthebigpicture.html>.

So, we are covering Isaiah 5-6 this morning. My guess is that you are very familiar with Isaiah 6 and have heard many sermons on it but that you have heard very few sermons on Isaiah 5. Isaiah 5 is usually overshadowed by Isaiah 6, but the fact is that Isaiah 5 and Isaiah 6 go together.

We need Isaiah 5 to help us understand and be fully impacted by Isaiah 6. As we work through these two chapters, we are going to answer the question: *How can spiritual transformation be brought about in our hearts and lives?*

I don't know about you, but this is a question I constantly wrestle with in my life and as a pastor. First, in my life, I want to see my heart and life transformed, and so I want to do the things that need to be done in order to be transformed more and more into the likeness of Jesus.

Second, I wrestle with it as I observe the lives of those I pastor. I want to see those who confess Christ as their Lord love Jesus, love His word, and long to be more and more like Christ. I want to see them love Jesus, His church body, worship, His word, prayer, and desire to live holy lives. How does that happen?

Isaiah 5-6 will help us answer the questions: *How can we be transformed spiritually so that we love Jesus and desire to live holy lives.*

I. Spiritual transformation begins with the confrontation of our sin (Isaiah 5:1-30)

When we think about spiritual transformation, the Bible often illustrates it with the idea of bearing fruit. If you remember, in the Gospels, Jesus curses the fig tree because it does not bear any fruit. In the Sermon on the Mount, He says we will know those who are true believers and those who are not by the fruit that they bear in how they live. So, when Jesus talks about bearing fruit, He is drawing on very old imagery in the Old Testament.

And just to be clear so that we know what it means to bear good fruit; Jesus said that *repentance* of sin was what it meant to bear good fruit. Also, Paul talked about the fruit of the Spirit: *love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control*. These are not the only fruit that the Spirit produces in His people. The list is long.

Anyway, in Isaiah 5, God confronted His people with the bad fruit that they bore. He compared their sins to rotten clusters of grapes. The lament in vv. 1-7 was that of a vineyard that bore wild, worthless grapes, and because it bore bad fruit, God was going to destroy the vineyard.

So, in vv. 1-7, the Lord sings his lament over Judah, then He pronounces six woes over the people of Judah. The six woes are the six clusters of rotten, worthless fruit/grapes in His vineyard.

Rotten Fruit 1: Woe to those who are violently greedy (vv. 8-10): The first woe confronted the landowners who enlarged their farming property by squeezing the poor out.

⁸ *Woe to those who add house to house
and join field to field
until there is no more room
and you alone are left in the land.*
⁹ *I heard the Lord of Armies say:
Indeed, many houses will become desolate,
grand and lovely ones without inhabitants.*
¹⁰ *For a ten-acre vineyard will yield
only six gallons of wine,
and ten bushels of seed will yield
only one bushel of grain.*

These wealthy people were not only greedy; they were violently greedy. They ruthlessly took over the property of the poor and needy. They were like King Ahab in Israel, who had Naboth murdered so he could take his vineyard. But it backfired on them. The more they took, the less the land produced, and the more they isolated themselves from the community of faith.

Rotten Fruit 2: Woe to those who constantly pursue hedonistic pleasures (vv. 11-17): The second woe was on those who didn't seek their pleasure in God but continually sought sensual, sexual pleasures. They lived to get drunk.

¹¹ *Woe to those who rise early in the morning
in pursuit of beer,
who linger into the evening,
inflamed by wine.*
¹² *At their feasts, they have lyre, harp,
tambourine, flute, and wine.
They do not perceive the Lord's actions,
and they do not see the work of his hands.*

They were looking for the next party and sought constant entertainment in order to distract themselves from their misery. These people had PhDs in partying so they could numb their pain.

Look what was going to happen to them in v. 14:

*Therefore Sheol [Hell] enlarges its throat
and opens wide its enormous jaws,
and down go Zion's dignitaries, her masses,
her crowds, and those who celebrate in her!*

It does not matter how important or how unimportant you think you are in this world. No one escapes the judgment of God. All will stand before the throne of God and give an account. Hell opens wide its jaws for those who have not repented of their sin and trusted in Jesus.

Rotten Fruit 3: Woe to those who are deceived by their sin (vv. 18-19): Now we learn that the people were so fooled by their sin that they continually lied to themselves. They told themselves that their sin was not really sin and that what they were doing was not that bad. They minimize their sin.

*Woe to those who drag iniquity
with cords of deceit
and pull sin along with cart ropes.*

The imagery in these two verses is that of people who were so attached to their sin that they drug it around with them everywhere. Think of driving a pickup around constantly pulling a trailer behind it? These people were pulling trailer loads of sin behind them and pretending the trailer was not there. They would side-swipe everyone with their sin because they drove like there was no trailer behind them.

We are not exempt. Hebrews 12:1 exhorted the people to lay aside every sin and weight that so easily entangled their lives. We can run the race that Jesus has marked out for us dressed in our warmups. We must strip our lives of the sin that slows us down so we can run the race with endurance.

Rotten Fruit 4: Woe to those who redefine sin (v. 20): If lying about the sin isn't working for you, then just do what is so popular in our modern culture—redefine sin. Be a law unto yourself. That way, you do not have to repent of anything. Simply redefine what sin is by calling good evil and evil good.

Rotten Fruit 5: Woe to those who pretend to be wise (v. 21): Now we hear Romans 1:21-22 in Isaiah 5:21:

*For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to
him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were
darkened.* ²² *Claiming to be wise, they became fools.*

These are people who justify their sin with plausible arguments. They say things like: *"I had to choose the lesser of two evils,"* or *"I would not have done that if it had not been done to me first, so I had no choice,"* or *"the ends justify the means."* These things may sound like wisdom, but there is no wisdom that justifies sin.

Rotten Fruit 6: Woe to those who deny social justice in order to justify their self-indulgence (vv. 22-23): What was going on here was that the social elite were getting richer and richer at the expense of the poor and marginalized. In particular, this was happening in the agricultural community. The poor were being squeezed out because the wealthy were conspiring to take their land businesses. Then the wealthy began to live in excess because they had denied justice and social justice to the common people.

In the long run, personal excess cannot remain merely a private issue. Eventually, the ripple effect of indulgence is felt at every level.

We see this in our society today. Social justice is denied when the wealthy have no sense of God. We cannot claim immunity when social justice is denied to people. The judgment and/or discipline that came on Judah will come upon us if we do not love our neighbors in the same manner we love ourselves.

Because Judah had no sense of God, they were going to be judged. Isaiah 5 concludes with two judgments on Judah. Both judgments begin with the word *"Therefore"* and are set in contrast to v. 7, where Yahweh says that He delighted in His people. Yet, the people, instead of delighting in the Yahweh, actually despised Him. Look in v. 24 at the first judgment:

*Therefore . . . they have rejected the law of the Lord of hosts, and have despised
the word of the Holy One of Israel.*

God delighted in them, but they despised Him, so judgment was coming.

Then the second *"Therefore"* is in v. 25. Judgment is coming. In vv. 26-30, Yahweh was going to whistle for His Assyria as one whistled for a dog, and they would come and destroy Judah.

Here is what we need to take away from these six woes. Isaiah 5 is a warning for us in the New Covenant. We have been given far more privileges than Judah. We have the complete word of God. We have been given the Messiah who came to live a perfectly sinless life in our place, died our death on the cross, was buried, and rose from the dead on the third day, thus defeating death and hell. By His atonement, Jesus purchased new hearts whereby we are supernaturally transformed by the Holy Spirit. We have been given an ocean of grace in Christ, and so to claim Christ as our Savior and yet to bear no fruit in our lives is a dangerous thing. Jesus, He is the True Vine, and all those who belong to Him will bear fruit.

The question is: When you look at your life do you see the fruit of the Spirit in your life? If there is no fruit, then maybe you do not belong to Christ. Do you love God? Do you love His word? Do you love to worship with God's people? Do you love God and hate sin? Do you live a life of continual repentance of your sin? Do you love your neighbor and desire to serve him/her? Do you love to tell others about how Christ has changed your life? Are you more like Jesus now than you were when you first made a profession of faith?

If you claim to be a Christian and you evaluate your life and do not see any fruit ask yourself what are trusting in. Do not trust in your *"profession of faith."* Do not trust in the experience of repeating a prayer. Do not trust in the fact that you were baptized. The only true test of whether you belong to Jesus or not is if He is constantly changing you because you are bearing the fruit of repentance and you see the fruit of the Spirit at work in your life. Examine your life.

There are some of us here today that probably ought to be more concerned with where we stand with God than we do. Some of us here do not really desire God. We simply want our *"get out of hell free cards."* We are like the old *"Three Dollars Worth of God"* poem by Wilbur Rees:

*I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please.
Not enough to explode my soul or disturb my sleep,
but just enough to equal a cup of warm milk,*

*or a snooze in the sunshine.
I don't want enough of God to make me love a person
of a different race/ethnicity or serve an illegal alien.
I want ecstasy, not spiritual transformation.
I want warmth of the womb, not new birth.
I want a pound of the Eternal in a paper bag.
I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please.²*

Three dollars worth of God never saved anyone. This is the way we lie to ourselves and wind up in Hell.

These six woes lead us to Isaiah's spiritual transformation. Let's look in Isaiah 6 and see how the Lord transformed Isaiah's life because, in his spiritual transformation, we find our path to spiritual transformation.

II. Spiritual transformation ends with the full conversion of our hearts (Isaiah 6:1-13)

Spiritual transformation begins when we are confronted with our sin and ends with the full conversion of our hearts.

In Isaiah 5, we were introduced to six woes, but there is one more woe to go. Isaiah's woe is the seventh woe and the most important one. The woe he confesses teaches us how we are spiritually transformed. Here is the process: *We are confronted with our sin (Isaiah 5); we confess our sin; the Lord cleanses us of our sin, and then we are commissioned as witnesses.*

1) Confession: We need the Lord to give us a clear vision of His holiness so we can confess our sin (Is. 6:1-5)

In vv. 1-5, we find Isaiah doing what most of the Israelites were doing, simply in the temple going through the motions of worship. He had shown up to worship, most likely with lots of concerns.

The great king of Judah, King Uzziah, had died, and everyone was sad. Uzziah had led the nation into a period of prosperity and wealth that had not been seen since Solomon's reign. Uzziah had reigned for 52 years, and for the most part, he was a godly king. However, his reign that led them to riches and affluence led the nation to forget God and become corrupt. Riches had led to their ruin, and now Assyria was coming as God's instrument of judgment.

As a result of forgetting God, Isaiah had just prophesied the six woes on the nation. Now the question was: How would they survive the terror that was about to be unleashed on the nation? What would they do? What we learn is that although Isaiah was a prophet, he was just like the rest of the people. He was simply a religious man going through the religious motions. He had done it for years and was never converted. Now, all that he knew and loved was about to be taken away. He was filled with anxiety about the future and the coming judgment.

It was in this situation of going through the religious motions that God broke into Isaiah's heart and awakened him to genuine trust and faith in God. Look in vv. 1-4:

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. ² Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. ³ And one called to another and said:

*"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory!"*

⁴ And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke.

² Wilbur Rees, *Three Dollars Worth of God*.

Verses 1-4 are the Lord giving Isaiah a clear vision of who He was. Notice what he saw. The train of His robe filling the temple is the full weight of His glory on display. It was a weighty glory and more than the temple could hold, so it overflowed.

Then there were the seraphim at the altar. They were creatures with six wings. They covered their feet and faces with four of their wings and flew with the other two. Now listen, do not think of little chubby angels plucking harps but beings like giants. They were also known as *the burning ones*. These beings were so overcome with the glory of the Lord that they had to hide themselves from the brightness of His glory.

Then, in light of the glory of the Lord, the *burning ones* made their confession: “*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Armies!*” To say God is “*holy, holy, holy*” is to increase the weight of the name of God.

The Lord God has many attributes. Scripture teaches that He is rich in grace and mercy. He is a God of justice, righteousness, and love. Love is probably the one we gravitate to the most. But the seraphim didn’t say God is: “*Love, love, love.*” They said He is “*holy, holy, holy.*” This is because this is Yahweh’s primary attribute. He is holy. He is altogether different and separate from us. He is not like us at all. He is in a class by Himself. A. W. Tozer said that:

*God is as high above an archangel as above a caterpillar, for the gulf that separates the archangel from the caterpillar is but finite, while the gulf between God and the archangel is infinite.*³

It is the vision of the weight of God’s glory displayed in His holiness that crushed Isaiah. This was not some super-spiritual experience where they felt all giddy inside. Isaiah was terrified. He had seen the Lord in His glory, and he knew that meant death, for no one sees the Lord and lives.

Isaiah, like the rest of the people of Judah, had a diminished view of God. Wealth and prosperity had dulled his spiritual senses. Affluence had given him a false sense of security and comfort. Now he had been exposed to the holiness of God, and it was like standing next to a blazing furnace of fire that was about to consume his very being. As a result, terror shot through his heart and mind, and he made the confession of the seventh woe in v. 5:

*Woe is me for I am ruined
because I am a man of unclean lips
and live among a people of unclean lips,
and because my eyes have seen the King,
the Lord of Armies.*

This was not a *woe* given to the people of Judah but the *woe* he pronounced upon himself. He knew he was unclean and standing in the pure light and glorious presence of pure holiness. He was undone! He was as good as dead.

Isaiah finally understands that he is the guilty one. He finally sees his sin in light of the holiness of God. Now Isaiah sees himself accurately because he sees himself in light of the holiness of Almighty God. You see, no one can truly understand himself until he has a clear vision of who God is.

How do we see the holiness of God today? For us, we must look to the cross. On the cross, you see the burning holiness of the Holy One of God dying for your sin. On the cross is the Holy One had the white-hot holy wrath of God poured out on Him for your sin.

Do you remember what Isaiah 53:3 said about Jesus?

*He was despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;*

³ A. W. Tozer, *Knowledge of the Holy*, 70.

*and as one from whom men hide their faces,
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.*

Jesus on the cross is the One from whom we should hide our faces because Jesus is the pure infinite holiness and perfection of God. Only the infinite Holy One of God is able to pay the debt of our sin against the infinite Holy God. And this is what we find in vv. 6-7.

2) Cleansing: We need the Lord to cleanse us of our sin (Is. 6:6-7)

*Then one of the seraphim flew to me, and in his hand was a glowing coal that
he had taken from the altar with tongs. ⁷ He touched my mouth with it and said:*

*Now that this has touched your lips,
your iniquity is removed, and your sin is atoned for.*

In these verses, we see the seraphim, the burning one, peel off from his flight pattern. He goes to the altar, the place of atonement, and takes a coal from the white-hot holiness of God and touches the *Refiner's Fire* to Isaiah's dirty mouth to spiritually transform Isaiah into God's holy messenger.

The touching of the burning coal to Isaiah's mouth symbolizes the finished work of Christ. Jesus is the One who entered the white-hot fire of the wrath of God to atone for our sin. Jesus is the One who pays for our sin by receiving the wrath of God for us on the cross. Then He comes to us and awakens us to our sin and takes our guilt away, and makes us holy by giving us His Holy Spirit.

Now we do not have to hide from God as Adam and Eve did in the Garden. Instead, we can enjoy being in the presence of our Holy God as it was intended from Creation. From all Creation, we were designed to be in the presence of God without any inhibitions, without any dread, without any guilt, and be completely satisfied in Him.

On the cross, Jesus restored our relationship with God by paying for our sin that separated us from God. Now our joy is complete, and so our response can be like Isaiah's response in vv. 8-13.

3) Commission: We need to answer the Lord's call to be His witnesses for Christ (Is. 6:8-13). Look in v. 8:

Then I heard the voice of the Lord asking:

Who will I send?

Who will go for us?

I said: Here I am. Send me.

After this glorious vision of God, Yahweh finally speaks, and He asks who will go and proclaim to His people the message He gives him. Isaiah said he would go, and so he gets the job everyone wants—the call to preach. Right?

Not only was he called to preach, but he was told that no one would listen to his sermons. Oh, they heard them, but they went in one ear and out the other.

When Isaiah finds out that he has been called to preach to people who won't listen to him, he asks the obvious question—How long do I have to do this, Lord? The Lord told him that he was to preach so long that it made the people blind, deaf, and dull. Ultimately, he was called to preach until the Lord had devastated the nation. Who wants to pastor a church like that? Right? No preacher wants that calling, but that was what he did, and he fulfilled it because his calling was anchored in a holy, exalted vision of God.

Yet, God did give him a slender thread of hope. Look in v. 13:

*Though a tenth will remain in the land,
it will be burned again.*

*Like the terebinth or the oak
that leaves a stump when felled,
the holy seed is the stump.*

Now Isaiah sees the coming of the Messiah. He sees the Promised One that we know as the Lord Jesus Christ.

Brothers and sisters, as Christians and as a church, we are called to be His witnesses. It is only the holy calling and commissioning of God that will sustain us as we preach the gospel of Christ to the lost. Some will remain blind, deaf, and dumb, but some will believe. Bottom line: We are all commissioned to be the witnesses of Christ.

This is what we are as the church. We are people commissioned to go. We are the ones who have answered the call to go.

The church is the place where heaven and earth meet. It is the place where the holiness of God dwells in the white-hot holiness of Christ so that when we are not simply going through the religious motions but are bearing the good fruit of confession and repentance of our sin, and we are reminded every Sunday that we are sent out as His witnesses.