

Isaiah 6:1-8 Sermon (CW Rev. 4:8-end)

Intro to Canons of Dort

Canons of Dort – how it is organized. Why it begins where it does. Why TULIP begins where it does, and the danger of doing so. Fitting to start a series on the canons with the greatness and the glory of God. B. B. Warfield, a great scholar of the Presbyterian persuasion in the 1900s was asked, “What is Calvinism?” He answered, “It is Christianity on its knees.” Here we see the greatness and the grandeur 伟大 of God. Here we see the littleness of man and through these Biblical teachings we are led to glorify God, and to humble ourselves.

Dealing with Isaiah 6 we approach a text of tremendous majesty, and we must deal cautiously with it. We do not in any way want to approach the text to force it into the truths of Canons I:1-2. And so we won’t draw through those articles line by line however we will see, in looking at Isaiah 6, what is key to these first two opening paragraphs of the Canons. Namely that God would be just and right to condemn the entire human race for their rebellion 反叛 against Him. (Elaborate) And secondly that though He has the right to do this, and though it would be ‘proper’ for Him to do this – though no one could legitimately raise a complaint against Him YET in His love He does more. He sends His Son that whoever believes in Him may not perish but have eternal life.

Key for our understanding of Christianity – start with God. Start with who He is and only then see who we are before Him.

Note on Sproul

Isaiah’s commission. Last week had the installation of office bearers. Certainly, this text would have suited that situation as well. Here Isaiah is being commissioned 委任 to his task – many scholars believe that even though the passage is recorded for us in chapter 6 it would have taken place before Isaiah began his ministry – this is his calling, this is his summons.

The summons of Isaiah would be to a very difficult task. Call to preach the Gospel is, indeed, a wonderful thing, but with Isaiah it was perhaps more than ordinarily seen to be a double edged sword. As we read on in chapter 6 Isaiah is to go the people saying **Keep on hearing but do not understand, keep on seeing but do not perceive** 感知

Make the heart of this people dull and their ears heavy.

Isaiah was sent with a two fold message – on the one side a message of destruction to the nation of both Israel and Judah, a summons for them to realize their sin; and on the other a message of restoration to the people of God – a light held out after all has been made dark. First, a word of judgment. Second, a word of hope – of forgiveness.

And this is his commission to preach that *full* gospel 全备福音 of the Lord Jesus Christ. And how does it begin? In the year that King Uzziah died, Isaiah sees the LORD. And if there is one note that dominates the entire scene, one word that should grip us more than any other it is, most certainly, that the Lord our God is *holy*.

It is a fitting lesson for Isaiah to begin with. What right for judgment, but that this God is holy? What possibility of grace, but that this God is holy?

Essential for us as well. In preaching on this passage R.C. Sproul points out that no where in all of Scripture is any attribute of God listed three times except for the attribute of God’s holiness, and that is done twice – once here and once in Revelation 4:18. Never does the Bible say that God is love, love, love. Never does the Bible say that God is truth, truth, truth or justice, justice, justice. But He is holy, holy, holy.

And what that means is that God, in Himself, is entirely distinct and separate from us. We cannot understand Him in light of ourselves, He must be seen as the LORD and before Him every knee must bow.

The incredible thing here, is that Isaiah must see this thrice holy God at the center of the Gospel. That if we are going to understand His judgment, we must come to grips with what it means that He is holy. And if we are going to understand His mercy, we must come to grips with what it means that He is holy.

Certainly there is no better place to start for our exposition on the 5 points of Calvinism than here.

The prophet Isaiah is called to see that at the heart of the message of the Gospel stands a thrice holy God.

What it means to be holy (v.2-4)

Justified judgment

Amazing grace

1. What it means to be holy

Setting – Uzziah as a godly king of Judah. 1 Chronicles 26:15 – **marvellously helped until he became strong.** In his day Judah grew in many ways. Their defences were built up, the borders of their nation expanded. Yet though Uzziah was by and large a godly king, the nation had not served the Lord under his reign as they ought and now Uzziah dies.

His son, Jotham was also a godly king, and yet we read in 2 Chronicles 27:2 **“But still the people acted corruptly.”** Political upheaval 政治动荡, and yet in that very year Isaiah saw the Lord **sitting on a throne – high and exalted.**

King unlike any other.

Thrice holy – important. But what does it mean to be holy? When God is described as holy, what are we saying about Him? What does that say about us?

“What is holy is distinct from whatever is not God. Holiness is distinctness 独特性, the distinctness of God from everything else.” (John Oswalt) Carson – Holy means God. Holy is not simply set apart for God but, at the core, holy *is* God. God is holy – holy is what it means for God to be God.

Not just a moral standard 道德标准 We’ll see that.

Think of it in terms of God everything about God is holy. Not so much one quality among many as it is a definition of all God's qualities. His love is a holy love. His wrath is a holy wrath. His justice is a holy justice. (And thus when we think of God's love we cannot think of it in human terms! Because holy love is distinct – it belongs to God).

There are several ways in which this comes across in the passage. First of all, note with me that the holiness of God, in essence, makes God **beyond description**.

What is God like? Isaiah gets a vision of God! How does Isaiah describe Him? Answer: He doesn't. All he does is describe the **train (or hem) of His robe – and it fills the temple**.

RC Sproul – beautiful connection here to the idea that the length of a king's robe was a sign of his power as a king. Draws an illustration from 1953 when Queen Elizabeth II was crowned. He remembered watching it – I looked up a picture on google. The train of the queen's robe went some 10-15 feet behind her. 6 ladies walked around the outside of it. Sign of her regal帝王 nature. Standard.

But the train of God's robe **fills the temple**. His majesty is, again, beyond description. And what does He say of God Himself? A: nothing! All he can do is record the worship of the seraphim.

And that is always the way it is with God. In Exodus 24 God meets with the elders of Israel. This is the account of that meeting – Ex. 24:9-10 **Then Moses went up, also Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel. And they saw the God of Israel, and there was under His feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone** 好像蓝宝石一样晶莹的铺路, **and it was like the very heavens in its clarity.**

That's it! That's the description – they described the pavement underneath His feet!

In 2 Cor 12 Paul speaks of a man who was caught up to the **third heaven**. The third heaven is a way of speaking of the dwelling place of God – the first the sky, the second the atmosphere beyond, the third – the dwelling of God. This is what Paul writes of the experience **He was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words which it is not lawful for a man to utter**.

Holiness in that He is beyond description.

Holy in that He is separate even from the seraphim.

Vision goes on to describe angels – seraphim – **fiery ones (literally)** that were in the presence of God. We don't know how many there were, but each has 6 wings. (Describe)

And they cry out one to another saying Holy, Holy Holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory.

Tendency to think holiness means separate from sin. And it does. But it is far more – for the angels, the seraphim were not sinful. Yet, they fly in such a way as to cover their eyes and their feet in the presence of God.

Sproul again draws out a very beautiful imagery here. He points out that God has made every creature on earth for the habitat where He has created it to live. Birds – wings, hollow bones. Fish – gills 鳃 fins.

The seraphim must be made with 6 wings. Separate from creation – not just from sin. **Altogether God.**

This holiness is a **glorious** holiness.

The seraphim cry out **Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory!**

When Moses saw the Lord, the face of Moses *shone*. He couldn't keep it in. It wasn't simply that he was happy – you know, like a young man who just had a young woman say “Yes” to his proposal of marriage – no the face was like a beacon. IT reflected the glory of God Himself.

But the holiness and glory of God is so great that its not just reflected in the face of Moses, but the entire **earth is full of His glory**. Everything good is a reflection 反射 of our God in His holiness. Even the harsh realities – that the wages of sin is death – reveals the holiness of our God (and is part of the glory of our God) – that He hates sin and its effects.

Verse 4. He is a holy God – that which pertains to God – ultimately indescribable, separate from creation, and glorious.

2. Justified judgment

But if holiness means He is separate from creation then also, most certainly, it means He is separate from what is foreign to creation – He is separate from sin. And as Isaiah sees the glory and holiness of God there is an automatic and exceptionally powerful response and it is this, verse 5, **woe is me, for I am undone...because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.**

Here is one of the most foundational 最基础性 connections we need to make when it comes to our study of God's word, and the truths of that word as they are captured in the Canons, and as they are seen in the way in which God brings salvation to sinners. The truths that the Bible teaches, summarized in the 5 points of Calvinism, can be difficult truths to hear. We will learn not only that God has chosen to save some, completely by His grace, from their sin, but we will be reminded also that others He has passed over in their sin – leaving them to face the penalty for what their hands have done.

To quote from the first article as all men have sinned in Adam, lie under the curse 咒诅 and are deserving of eternal death, God would have done no injustice by leaving them all to perish and delivering them over to condemnation on account of sin.

He would not have been wrong to condemn the entire world! Every single one. God is holy! If we in our rebellion chose to turn against Him, to strive to be like Him – to pull Him from His throne or at the very least to share it with Him we are undone.

And here, Isaiah comes to see it. Isaiah the prophet. Isaiah the one who will proclaim 宣告 **woe** to others now calls it upon himself. This word **woe** is a prophetic word. The prophets had the right, by God, to proclaim both blessings and cursing. Blessings for those who obeyed, curses for those who did not. Those curses were declared in statements of woe – Bibles open to Isaiah 5. (**read through**)

But before God **every mouth must be stopped – and all the world brought under the judgment of God**. Who can claim *anything* in the presence of this God? The answer is – no one! Isaiah realizes He is undone – what a phrase! What a word! As if he has simply come apart simply because **his eyes have seen the King**, and he knows the wickedness of his own heart.

He describes it as himself being a man of **unclean lips dwelling among a people of unclean lips**. Now it is remarkable that, in the presence of God, the sin he seems to decry to the greatest extent is the way he speaks. Is that the point? In a sense. For Isaiah must realize that **out of the overflow 满溢 of the heart the mouth speaks**. He knows that the words he utters that question God's goodness, or that question God's justice or that question God's love are signs of a heart that has not honoured the **holy, holy, holy** Lord.

Judgment is deserved. And the judgment we deserve is not unfair, it is not wrong, and against it no one, on the final day will be able to speak.

Jesus says of His coming that when He comes the people will cry out for the mountains to fall upon them, and the hills to cover them. Why? Because they will not be able to face the God they know they are **undone** before.

He is a holy God.

3. Amazing Grace

But the text goes on, and God extends grace. Note: uncalled for, unasked for, unexpected. It is the result of a HOLY God who is completely separate from sinners – who does things differently than you or I.

Isaiah sees only his own destruction. **Then one of the seraphim flew to me having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth with it and said**

Behold this has touched your lips, your iniquity is taken away, and your sin is purged. (Atoned for)

This is the second article in our canons. **But in this the love of God was manifested 彰显, that He sent His only begotten Son into the world that whosoever should believe in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.**

The coal from the altar is, indeed, a picture of Jesus Christ.

Key – this belongs no less to the holiness of God than judgment! We have a HOLY justice displayed in His wrath against sin and sinners, and we have an equally holy love shown in the sending of His Son Jesus Christ.

And beloved let us just take a moment to consider that this afternoon. What the seraphim could not do – we will do! The seraphim were made for their habitat. Fish are made for the sea, birds for the air, seraphim for the presence of God. That mean that they would have to cover their face and their feet and fly.

But beloved in the Lord in Christ we will have an access to God that the angels do not have. And indeed, we have it now already!

1 Corinthians 2:9 **eye has not seen nor ear heard nor have entered into the heart of man the things which god has prepared for those who love Him...but God has revealed them to US through His Spirit.**

Glory of the Gospel is that this holy God REVEALS HIMSELF not only to Isaiah, but to YOU! Paul says that Moses put a veil over his face because of the surpassing 超越 glory that was fading away but, he writes in 2 Cor. 3:18 **we all with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the lord, are being transformed into that same image from glory to glory just as by the Spirit of the Lord.**

We will behold Him not in a mirror darkly but face to face. We will be created not with wings to cover eyes and feet, but with the vey righteousness of Christ so that we need not cover eyes or feet. We will behold the invisible, indescribable God.

Key – is that the great love of God shown in Christ does not become the ONLY attribute of God. We don't make Him out in OUR image. We don't define Him according to OUR likeness. We let God be God. We let God be HOLY.