

**Isaiah 6:1-9a**  
**(Psalm 96:1-13; John 4:23-26)**  
**“Worship and Witness”**

**Introduction**

What do you long for? What do you desire so much that you can almost taste it? What brings you to your feet with a shout and has you clapping your hands before you even realize it? What makes you instinctively step back in awe and wonder? I remember as a little child first hearing Jascha Heifetz play Tchaikovsky’s violin concerto, a piece that I now find far too lush and cloyingly romantic. But at that moment, something deep inside me responded passionately to the music. Later, many musicians – from Miles Davis to Eric Clapton – would evoke that same sense of longing. Whenever I drive into the mountains, whatever the weather, however bleak and cold, my heart stirs, I feel exhilarated, refreshed, and filled with anticipation. Something awakens deep within me that I know cannot finally be satisfied by anything I will find in the mountains. For some of you, it is an athletic performance, a great work of art, or the presence of beauty. What is the source of this longing?

You and I were made for worship. All of our longings – for beauty, intimacy, excellence, goodness, truth, faithfulness – all these and more are intimations of our having been made for intimate fellowship with the source of all that is good and true and beautiful. Nothing here on earth can satisfy that longing. Certain things can awaken it and perhaps relieve it for a moment. But we are left hungering and thirsting for more. The only thing that can satisfy that deepest of all hungers is the living God who made us for himself and who meets us in true worship, where he encounters us, lets us drink the wine of intimacy with God himself, permits us to experience the excellence, the beauty, and the goodness that we have longed for all our lives but could never fully find in nature or in other people.

Why is it that for most of us, worship is nothing like what I am describing? For many, it is a chore, something to be done in an hour and then forgotten for a week. True worship, worship that Jesus described as “worship in spirit and truth,” that is, worship that engages both heart and mind, involves a series of encounters with God and his Word, and with each encounter, our worship deepens, our sense of awe and wonder become palpable.

I invite you this morning to consider the prophet Isaiah’s life-transforming encounter with God, and its four stages of growing recognition and response as described in our text. These same moments of recognition and response should mark our worship, and lift us out of the ordinary, dull routine of Sunday morning, giving us a passion to be together in the Lord’s house, experiencing that for which we have longed all of our lives. Note, as well, how each new insight flows logically from the last, as the living God reveals himself and speaks his Word to Isaiah and to us.

## Body

### **1. First, we catch a glimpse God's glory.**

We see the Lord enthroned high above everything that would frighten or intimidate us, and are dazzled by the light of his glory, the weighty splendor of the perfection of all his attributes. We hear him praised, as he ought to be praised, by those whose lips are clean. They sing of the essence of his perfection: "Holy, Holy, Holy." Note, they do not sing of themselves, but of him. Worship is first of all about God himself.

### **2. Secondly, we recognize our own spiritual poverty.**

We see ourselves in the light of God's glory: even our praise and worship is polluted by our sin. We are unworthy to sing the praises that he created us to sing. We mourn our condition. How can we ever be fully human, the people we were created to be if we are cut off from relationship with the source of light and love and every good thing for which our hearts long? Religion cannot help us; mere moral improvement cannot make us right before a holy God.

### **3. Thirdly, we taste and see the great good news of God's amazing grace.**

We hear with wonder that God has made atonement for our sin. We experience the searing, healing touch of God's salvation and realize that our guilt has been removed, and that our praise and worship are now pleasing and acceptable to the Lord through nothing that we have done: it is all of grace. We are staggered and overjoyed at what God has done for us!

### **4. Fourthly, we recognize and respond to our true vocation.**

We hear the longing cry of God's heart for his rebellious creation: "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" We respond from hearts made new: "Here am I. Send me!" We realize that worship is to propel us into a needy world. We go, not with human wisdom, but with God's Word.

## Conclusion

Throughout the Scriptures, worship is always to issue in God's people responding to the Great Commission: to proclaim his glory to the nations in word and deed, and to make disciples who will join us around the throne, singing the praises of our great God and King, and growing together in our understanding of and glad obedience to the great salvation God has given us by his amazing grace.

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