

Have you ever experienced an earthquake? If you have, you know how terrifying they are. During my year in Mexico, my co-worker and I visited Oaxaca in the southern part of the country. We were just about to turn in for the night, when everything in our hotel room started shaking along with the ground under our feet. When the one thing you expect never to move – the ground – does, it leaves you trembling right along with the earth. We were terrified.

But then the tremor passed. Relief set in – we were okay. And we still trembled for a few minutes. Not so much out of fear – danger had passed. Now out of reverence and awe over what we had just experienced: A power so great it could shake millions of tons of earth beneath us. How awesome it was.

I bring it up because Isaiah experiences something similar in our lesson this morning. When God calls him to serve as a prophet, he brings Isaiah into the temple. But not the earthly one standing in Jerusalem at the time. No, this is God’s heavenly throne room, filled with God’s glory. And that glory is so great that it shakes the very floor beneath his feet. Call it a God-quake, if you will. And we see how this encounter with God’s glory both leaves Isaiah trembling in terror and then in awe and reverence for God and his calling.

But we need to see it, too. Because so often the type of trembling we ought to have in our relationship with God is lacking. So this morning God invites us into his throne room, too, to be Awe-struck by his glory. It’s a glory that 1) crushes us, 2) cleanses us, 3) changes us.

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, 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.”**

⁴At 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.”

⁶Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. ⁷With it he touched my mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.”

⁸Then 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!”

I. It crushes us

What an awesome sight Isaiah saw. Can you picture it with him? Suddenly, he’s whisked away to God’s heavenly dwelling. And there, before his eyes, is the Lord Almighty. He’s seated on a throne that’s high and exalted – far above any and every earthly throne. He’s so big that the coattails of his robe are filling the whole temple. And then Isaiah sees seraphs – fiery angels of God – with six wings. With two,

they fly above him. With two they cover their faces – this King is too glorious even for holy angels to gaze upon. His majesty is so great that with another two they cover their feet in reverence and humility.

So filled with awe in his presence, they can't help but praise him constantly, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty," they call out to one another. Holy: That word means set apart, one of a kind, in a class all to himself. That's God, when it comes to all of his attributes. His power knows no rival. His wisdom has no limits. He is perfect, flawless in every way. They say it three times, not just because God is three-in-one, but also for emphasis. No one even comes close to comparing to God! "The whole earth is full of his glory!" they sing, and the whole building shakes and fills with smoke.

Friends, it's good for us to see this. How glorious and majestic is our God. It's good to see angels singing his praises and covering their faces to be reminded of the reverence and awe that are due him. Because it's something that's getting lost in Christianity today. It's something that we easily lose in our relationship with God.

Sure, we can't see him, but in worship, we very truly come into this God's presence. That should make us tremble in awe – that here the King, the LORD Almighty, graces us with his presence! And yet we can treat what goes on here so casually and non-chalantly, as if it were no big thing. Instead of wonder and reverence in our hearts, apathy and indifference. Maybe even as if when we show up God should be happy we're gracing him with our presence.

But it's not just in here we struggle with reverence and awe. In our daily living, we don't treat God as the majestic, Almighty king. Instead of living for his glory, so often we live for our own. Instead of recognizing I exist for him, he exists for me. Treat God as a part of my life, not the one by whom and for whom I exist. Less as a King than as a life-coach whose advice we can take or leave, or a help-line to get aid in time of need. It's arrogance, really - that tries to bring God more down to our level, or raises us up to his, in our minds.

But standing in the reality of God's glory sweeps that pride away. Really, it crushes us. It crushed Isaiah. Did you hear what he said at the sight of it all? Not, "Whoa, this is cool." He says, "**Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips living among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.**"

Do you see what's going on here? When I was in gradeschool, I was pretty good at geography. Easily won our school's bee in little Nicollet, MN. I thought pretty highly of my skills. But then I got to state meet. I was confronted by kids who knew way more than I did. And it crushed my high opinion of myself.

You might think you're pretty wise...but confronted by the all-knowingness of God? Your "wisdom" proves utter foolishness. You might think you're pretty strong...but confronted by the omnipotence of God? Your "strength" proves utter weakness. Isaiah might have thought he was a pretty good guy. Compared to wicked Israel, a saint! But then he's in the presence of the holy, holy, holy God! And even his "goodness" is proved utterly sinful. And it crushed him. "I'm ruined," he says. "Unclean lips, just as unclean as the rest."

It crushes us, too. We like to think we're pretty good. Then we're confronted by God's holiness, and the truth comes out. Unclean lips that have spoken lies and gossip, and even when they're praising God, it's half-hearted. Unclean hands that have done hurtful things, and even when they help, for all the wrong reasons. Unclean eyes that have seen things that never should have seen. Unclean, just like the rest. "I'm ruined" – how can the holy meet the unclean without destroying it?

II. *It cleanses us*

But see what happens next. Isaiah is trembling in fear. And I'd imagine that it got even worse as one of the fiery seraphs flies towards him with a burning coal in his hand. Usually in the Old Testament, when fire comes out from the Lord, it destroys!

But not this time. Did you notice where this burning coal was taken from? The altar. What happened on the altar? Animals were sacrificed. Lambs carried sinners' guilt away from them and were destroyed in the sinners' place to atone for them. And so the seraph touched the coal to Isaiah's mouth: **"See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."**

Of course, goats and rams and lambs could never truly take away sin. They just pointed ahead to the One who would. The One that God the Father, in his undeserved love, gave into this world for us. God the Son, Jesus Christ, who lived a spotless life, all so that he could become the bearer of this world's sins. The Lamb who carried Isaiah's uncleanness and yours and mine away from us and onto the altar of the cross. Who was crushed in your place by the holiness of God there. Can you hear it? "My God, why have you forsaken me?" In other words, "Woe to me! I am ruined!" And as he breathed his last, the ground shook...the doorposts and foundations of the earthly temple...and the curtain inside was torn in to. Sin atoned for. And today, God the Spirit flies to you through the word with the forgiveness Christ won for you, touches it to your lips, and says to you still: **"See? Your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."**

I. It changes us

I'd imagine Isaiah was still trembling at this point. But this is the post-earthquake trembling. In taking away his sin, God took away his terror, so this is the, "How awesome is this God!" kind of trembling. You can hear the change in what comes next: **⁸Then 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!"** Interesting, isn't it? He doesn't even wait to hear the job description (and if you keep reading, it's not a pleasant one!) But Isaiah's still eager to go for him, because of who's sending him. He's filled with awe. That the King who is so high and exalted saw fit to invite him into his presence. That the holy, holy, holy Lord didn't destroy him, but made him holy, too, so he could be there without fear. That the King who needs no helper and has powerful angels to do his bidding graciously invites him onto his team and offers the opportunity to serve. "Here am I! Send me!"

May it fill us with awe, too. That the God whose power and wisdom have no equal put them to work to save us. That the king whom not even the highest heavens can contain sees fit to dwell with us here. That the Holy One invites us into his presence in his word, not to destroy us, but to make us holy. To crush us, cleanse us, and change us – fill us with an awe and wonder for him that spills into our daily lives. So that more and more we live to his glory, not our own; more and more God becomes not just part of my life, but my very reason for living. So that, in whatever calling he's placed us in, even when it's not pleasant, we say, "Here I am! Use me!" Awe-struck by the majesty and mercy of our God. Amen.