## **Asia Link**

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Preacher: Rev. Bill Ferguson

[0:00] I don't think I've ever been so far above a congregation when I've preached before. One feels that the thing that you need most of all from this place is a parachute. But it's my joy to be with you, and I'm so grateful to your pastor for allowing me to gatecrash, and particularly the service here this evening, and then to tell you about the work of AsiaLink afterwards.

As he said, my name is Bill Ferguson. I am a former accountant whom God called into ministry, where I served for 23 years as a Baptist minister, and was glad to do so, but I'm also glad in some senses it's over.

I love the ministry of the Word. I love the pastor work. I hated the church politics. So I'm glad not to have the church politics anymore. I got saved as a 20-year-old through the lady who has been my wife now for the past 48 years.

She introduced me to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, and I surrendered my life to him in 1972. So I've been a believer for 51 years. It hardly seems that.

And in all that time, the Lord has more than proved himself to me through a variety of different situations, different experiences, and I still count it a joy to be known as a child of the living God.

[1:29] My second visit to this beautiful part of the world, last time I was here in May of 2022, when the weather was not quite so kind.

In fact, we were on a beach one day, and the wind and the rain were both horizontal. I wondered where I'd come to. But this time I was able to walk in Lusk and Tyre and see it.

It is so incredibly beautiful. I mean, I tell you, I'm glad that this is a small island and that you don't get a huge amount of tourists because they would ruin it. The only difficulty with going to Lusk and Tyre is negotiating the bikes and the camper vans.

I don't know if you experienced that or not. It's not the easiest. And I looked at some of the bikers. Well, when I say bikers, I mean the people riding the bikes. Half of them were as old as me. And I'm thinking, what are you doing going up these hills on a bike?

Anyway, it takes all sorts, I suppose. But it's a joy to be here. And I trust and pray that God will lead us and guide us as we wait in his presence.

[2:39] So much spoken about the kingdom of God these days, and rightly so. The person of the Lord Jesus Christ in both his speaking and in his action displayed the reality of the kingdom of God.

The miracles and everything affirming the fact that the kingdom of God is greater than the kingdom of the enemy. The strong man is bound. Christ's work went on apace.

And the reality of God's kingdom was seen in him. And we still talk a lot about the kingdom of God. But I wonder if we sometimes start to think about who is the God of the kingdom.

And when we look at this passage in the opening part of Isaiah chapter 6, I want to suggest to you that what we have here is not so much a narrative as a series of pictures.

Isaiah doesn't tell us a story particularly, although it is a story in some form. But what he's presenting to us is a series of pictures that enable us to grasp something of the reality of who the God of the kingdom is.

[3:35] And what I hope we can do tonight is to look at it in pictorial form and to look at it in terms of the grandeur that we see as opposed to looking at single words and bits and pieces like that. I remember very clearly many years ago taking a trip to Loch Tummel.

Some of you probably know where that is. Those of you who have actually ventured off the island will probably know where it is. And in Loch Tummel there is this place called the Queen's View. And it's called the Queen's View because it was one of Queen Victoria's favourite places to go.

And when you stand at the head there above the loch and above everything else and you look out, what you see is a picture of absolute majesty and glory and grandeur.

But if you stop to look at the colour of the trees, the shining of the water, all the different nuances that are there, you miss the reality of the grandeur. And what I hope we can do tonight is as we look at some of these pictures that the prophet paints for us of the reality of who this God of the kingdom is, that we might be able to see a grand picture, that we might be able to take in a variety of different things without all of, if you like, the details.

And I would ask you in that to try to listen, not so much with your ears, but to listen with your heart. To engage your heart with this God of the kingdom who is revealed to us in this prophetic word from Isaiah.

[5:01] To begin our consideration, I want us to look at what I've called the revelation to the prophet, because Isaiah begins with a particular historical context, so we'll begin to that, we'll come to that in a moment.

But for the time being, I want us to dwell on the fact that Isaiah saw the Lord. And it's important to understand that this was a revelation that God gave to this young prophet from the kingdom of Judah.

God chose to reveal himself to Isaiah, and he did so for a purpose. And that's huge for us, because it's my personal contention that spiritual truth is never discerned.

It is always revealed. We are not in a position, either intellectually or in any other capacity, to work out God for ourselves. To work out things of God for ourselves.

We don't have that kind of discernment. And were it not for the fact that God were to reveal himself to us, and reveal things to us, we would never come to understand the reality of spiritual truth, nor understand the God who is himself truth.

And so God chooses to reveal himself to this young prophet Isaiah. I mean, where in Scripture, for example, do you read any writer saying, you know, I just sat down and worked out who God was, and what he was calling me to be, and what he was calling me to do.

And I believe that later on in this prophecy of Isaiah, chapter 55, under the revelatory anointing of God, he would reveal to Isaiah why that is the case.

Because he says, For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my thoughts higher than your, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.

In other words, God is saying to us, do not waste your time trying to work me out. Look for the revelation. Be in a place where you can apply to yourself, grab hold for yourself, that which I choose to reveal to you.

And that is the outworking of God's sovereign will and God's sovereign purpose. We only know what God chooses to reveal to us. And so I guess that the challenge for all of us, not simply in this time, but in every age and in the age to come for however long that will be until Christ returns, the challenge for us is this, are we looking in these days for God to reveal himself to us?

[7:22] Are we too preoccupied with our own ways, our own thoughts, our own situations? Are we looking for God to reveal ourselves to us? Or have we become a people who are too comfortable in the ways that we are, that we really don't want God to disturb us?

I was talking about earlier on about my current situation. I retired in 2017, as I say, and I'm big into my golf.

I really enjoy my golf. And when I was pastor of a church in St. Anne's, we had Royal Lytham in St. Anne's, one of the top hundred golf courses in the world on our doorstep. And I was a member there for 15 years.

And because of my interest in golf and my interest in people, I got asked if I would take on a voluntary role while still being the pastor of a church or being chaplain to the European Golf Tour. And I know Mark Fleming extremely well.

You'll have a blast. You'll not get a word in edgeways, but you'll have a blast. And so I spent nine seasons as chaplain on the, you know, the European Golf Tour.

[8:24] I wasn't looking for that. I had no idea that that was going to be. Now, that was one of these, you know, you know when God calls you to do something and reveals himself to us and you might want to pray into it before you say, yeah, you're going to do that.

Well, I mean, I did that with the golf thing. I prayed for about what had to be all of 30 seconds and said, yeah, I would be happy to, you know, to do that. But there have been other situations in my life where I have been extremely comfortable or I've had a plan and purpose of my own, like buying a house next to a golf course to retire to and hoping that you'll get your golf handicap down only to have three months before you retire the offer of coming, working with Asia Link, traveling to Asia and traveling to Scotland telling about the incredible things that God was doing.

I was not looking for that. And after becoming convinced through the ministry of my wife that this is what God was calling me to, I stepped into it and I have found it incredibly fulfilling and challenging.

But the bottom line is, beloved, that we can sometimes become too settled in our ways, too settled in the things that we are comfortable with, that we perhaps don't notice when God is seeking to reveal something of himself to us and what that might mean for us.

But when God reveals something to us of himself, it's always for a purpose. It's always for a purpose. And so it was here with the prophet Isaiah. Like I said earlier on, what we have here, I think, are pictures or images of God.

[9:58] And again, I want to reiterate, please try to listen to this with your heart. Let your heart absorb the truth of what God wants to say. Don't let it stay in your head. It's often been said that, in terms of Christian understanding, the biggest journey is the journey from here to here.

And so try to engage with your heart. Because I want to share with you what I believe the images are that we have here. I believe here that we've got an image of authority.

Now, nowhere does Isaiah tell us how this encounter with God came or what the specific of the revelation was. There are scholars who are greater than me who have tried to pontificate on this, and they have their own ideas.

The point for me is that God chose to reveal himself to Isaiah. And in that revelation, God chose to reveal that he was a God of authority. Because the image really just kind of explodes on the screen, as it were.

We don't have a historical... Well, but we do have a historical context, and that's important. Isaiah says it was in the year that King Isaiah died that he saw the Lord. Isaiah died around 740 BC, and he was one of the best and longest reign of the kings.

But he was also one who got ahead of himself, tried to take on a role that God had not called him to, to take on the role of a priest and burn incense on the altar of incense.

Now, the Word of God tells us that that was the prerogative of the priesthood. And so God judged Isaiah, and he was struck down with leprosy before he could make the offering. He was driven out of the temple and had to live, as was the law, in social isolation until he died.

He was not buried in the same tomb as the rest of the kings. How ignominious. But it does point out to us the danger of trying to be what we're not.

It does point out to us the danger of disobeying the express Word of God, because I believe that God will hold us accountable in that situation. And where is God?

In this vision, He's sitting on His throne, high and exalted. The contradistinction here is incredible, because here you have Isaiah, the great king, dead, but the real king is still on His throne.

[12:20] The image of the throne is the image of authority, because it was from the throne that the king ruled and reigned. He was and is the real king, as we see in this vision.

There is no other who can approximate to Him. God has no pretenders to His throne. God has no challengers for His throne. The authority of God is way beyond what anybody else might want to try to get to.

An incredible image of authority. Now you may well remember, as recently as the 6th of May, our new king, Charles III, was crowned seated on a 700-year-old chair, which obviously did not come from Ikea.

And he had all of the trappings of kingship, but he has no real power. He looks good, but he has no real power. He's a constitutional monarch with no real power.

But beloved, our God sits on His throne and His rule is absolute and His power is limitless. Kings come and kings go, but the Lord, the Almighty, rules and reigns forever.

[13:34] Isaiah saw this and it sunk into His being, as we'll discover in a moment or two. But that is the image that we have here. We have an image of the God, the God who is the king and the king with all the authority.

He is not to be trifled with. He is not to be messed around with. He is not to be second-guessed. He is to be feared and to be obeyed.

More than that, I think we also have an image of majesty. The vision speaks loudly of His authority as He sits on His throne, but there's also the image of majesty. And Isaiah tells us that His robe or His train filled the temple.

In the history of the people of God in the Old Testament, the presence of God was manifest in the temple, which was the place associated with the presence of God. And it was huge. And Isaiah says that as he saw the Lord, he saw that His robe, the very symbol of majesty, filled the temple.

He didn't say it was a big robe. He said it filled the temple. Not only was the majesty of God revealed, but this was a fullness of majesty.

[14:46] This was a plenitude of majesty, if you like. In ancient times, the flowing train on a monarch's robe was a symbol of glory and splendor. To understand the importance of a train, we have to remember that in those days, all clothing had to be constructed from scratch.

A bit like the Harris tweed jacket that I pushed the boat out with the danger of incurring the wrath of my wife yesterday. Come from the threads, they have to be the, whatever the threads might be, here it's wool, they have to be spun and then woven into cloth.

The cloth has to be cut and sewn into garments by hand. And that was a time-consuming process. Only the rich and the powerful could afford to add extra length to their robes.

Because the longer the train, the more glorious and splendid the king. And as he paraded past his subjects, the length of his robe was meant to impress.

But here Isaiah tells us that this robe of God's glory filled, filled the temple. Isaiah's statement, I believe, conveys the magnitude of God's glory compared to that of any earthly king or queen.

[15:57] Symbolically, the robe represents God's infinite splendor and majesty. As one preacher explained, and I like this, and I hope you get this.

You can maybe make this one of the questions. I don't know. It's maybe not worth a question. But one writer said, on one occasion he said, air is the atmosphere of earth.

God's glory is the atmosphere of heaven. And one day, we will breathe God's glory. Isn't that incredible? Air is the atmosphere of earth.

Glory, God's glory is the atmosphere of heaven. And one day, one day, we will breathe God's glory. I love that. Now, I don't know when the Lord Jesus Christ is going to come again.

Nobody does. Only the Father knows that. But I can say one thing with absolute certainty, and I will challenge you to disagree with me, and that is, it's closer today than it's ever been.

[17:01] And one day, we get to breathe the glory of God, to be in His presence, and to see that glory, not by faith, but in absolute reality.

Selwyn Hughes once noted in this image, he said, there is no room for anyone else here. No room for anyone else here. And that's right. Because God shares His glory with no one. No one else deserves a smidgen, if you like, of the glory of God.

Here we see His incomparable splendor. Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, John, the Revelator, give us glimpses of their heavenly visions. They saw a high and exalted throne encircled by an ethereal rainbow, seraphs crying, holy, holy, holy, lamps blazing, lightning flashing, thunder rumbling, angels and saints worshiping.

This is what Isaiah saw. He saw the glory of God fill the temple in his robe. Now when we meet a monarch, we are supposed to greet him or the late Queen Elizabeth as your majesty.

I've never met a king or a queen. Have any of you ever met a king or queen? No? No? But I did meet Prince Charles on one occasion up in Wick.

[18:25] He came up to the Castle of May every year and he always went to the May Games, the Highland Games. And it was quite an experience. My wife and I were financial supporters of the Castle of May Trust and so we were introduced to His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales.

Now I am, I have to tell you, I am not normally stuck for words. My father used to say of me that I was vaccinated by a gramophone needle. But on that day when I saw the future heir to the throne approach me with his hand out, I had no clue what to say.

The extent of the conversation went, I see you are not taking part in the tug of war. I said, no sir, I was not. Have you seen the size of me?

And he just laughed and said, ach well, maybe there is another day and walked off and left me. That was my conversation with the now King Charles III. I felt stupid because I had nothing to say to him.

But when we behold the majesty of God, what do you say? You fall prostrate before His awesome glory. Isaiah saw this.

[19:41] And he was changed. The glory and the majesty of God is incomparable. As the image progresses, we come into contact with some angelic beings called the seraphim.

This is their only occurrence in the scripture. They are literally the fiery ones. And their description and activity spells out what we've already been saying. They are said to live above the throne.

You can almost see them hovering, waiting in the presence and on the command of God. But it says the scripture which reveals, that I think is revealing, they have three pairs of wings. With one pair, they cover their eyes.

What that tells me is that even though they dwell in the presence of God, they are not fit to look on His face. They cover their eyes. With the second pair of wings, they cover their feet.

What that says to me, it speaks to me of their total humility and submission to the will of God. And with the third, they flew, showing that they were there to do the bidding of God alone.

[20:39] Majesty and authority and power disclosed. And as they flew, they cried out, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty. The whole earth is full of His glory.

At the sound of their voices, the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. The threefold declaration of the seraphs was of the holiness of God.

The absolute purity, the altogether otherness of the God who is not like us. And I really want us to get a hold of this because this God of the kingdom is the God who is declared to be thrice holy.

There are those who see in this a threefold, a Trinitarian reference. Not for me because the context for me is majesty and glory and not about the three, you know, the God in three persons.

But He is not just holy. He is holy, holy, holy. And the reason I ask that we listen to these scriptures with our hearts is because I believe that in so many quarters of more than evangelicalism, we have become too comfortable and too familiar with God.

[21:51] There is a real tendency to speak only of the love of God. And we are right to do that because God is a God of love. That's what the scripture declares. We sometimes hear to speak about God as all love, which is true.

But we get kind of cozy with this to the extent that we can grow into a sentimental view of God. We get to the point where we even commit the ultimate heresy, and that is that God loved me so much.

God does not have degrees of love. The reference in John 3, 16 of God so loved the world literally means God loved the world in this way, not God loved the world so much. God does not have degrees of love.

His love is perfect. And then we hear people say, well, Jesus died for me on the cross. I must have been worth it.

And everything within me wants to shout. The whole point is that Jesus died for you and you weren't worth it. You were an enemy of God, rebelling against His loving and legitimate authority, and in His grace, and as the expression of His love, the Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross in your place and in my place to destroy the works of the devil in order that we might be forgiven for our sin.

and I believe that one of the problems we have with modern evangelicalism is that we have lost sight of the fear and the holiness of God. God will not be trifled with.

He's not a toy that we pick up and lay down at a whim. God is an absolute holy God and that holiness of God is awesome and it's terrifying.

One who is altogether different than us and in whose presence there is an expression of power which shakes even doorposts of a massive temple. Now that doesn't mean that we can't think of the love of God because God is love and it doesn't mean that we ought not to sing our, well you don't sing hymns do you?

So maybe I'll skip that bit so as not to confuse. But what I was going to say was that that doesn't mean that we can't sing our love songs, our songs of love to our Lord and to our Saviour because the two are not mutually exclusive.

they come together. God is a holy God, an awesome God, a majestic God, a God to be feared but at the same time He is a God of love whom we can also love.

[ 24:31 ] It makes Christianity sound complicated but it's not. It's not. We need to hold in tension the fact that God is a God of love who at the same time is one who is awesome in holiness and terrifying in majesty.

It's about a balancing act so that we can see as far as I can see the whole picture. And so we have these images, these visions, these pictures of God, this God of the kingdom that Isaiah received.

But like I said to you earlier on, God reveals Himself for a purpose and so that purpose is declared to Isaiah. When we come to apprehend a revelation of this nature and magnitude in relation to God, there has to be a response.

And we see that response in the action of Isaiah. He is not comforted with what God has revealed of Himself. He does not imbibe some kind of warm, sorry, cozy, warm, lovely feeling as if he were stroked by the presence of God.

He is totally convicted in the light of the revelation of the holiness and the majesty and the glory of God. Isaiah's first response was, woe is me! Convicted of his sin.

[25:44] Convicted of the fact that he stands condemned as it were in the presence of this God. Isaiah convicted of his own sinfulness. It's an incredible contrast.

A supreme juxtaposition if you like. On the one hand is the absolute holiness of God and by comparison here is the abject sinfulness of humanity. God is entirely other than we are.

He is not like us. His holiness discloses our sinfulness and that's why we need to see this whole picture of God so that we understand that our sinfulness is not a small issue but is a challenge in itself to the holiness of God.

It is not nothing. I once had somebody tell me that he was referring to Baptists and he said to me, he says, you Baptists make so much of sin and I'm thinking, what?

You Baptists make so much of sin and I said, yeah, we Baptists make so much of sin because it's going to be a horrible, horrendous thing to stand in the presence of God without that sin forgiven.

[ 26:54 ] You seem to be more interested in sin than God is at that point. Am I allowed to say that? I nearly punched him. At that point, I was absolutely astounded and horrified that somebody should suggest that we make more of sin than God does.

And so for the next week, I took him through the reality of the cross and what sin meant to God. Isaiah is convicted of his sin and that conviction goes to his mouth.

He says, woe is me, I'm a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips. Why his unclean lips was the sin that was discouraged, I don't know. But perhaps he has in mind some of the things that he's just said because in the previous chapter there's a series of six woes which he's just pronounced on people.

Maybe Isaiah feels that some of what he said was unwarranted, we don't know. But whatever it was specifically, it was revealed in the light of the holiness of God. And so Isaiah does not just realize his situation, he makes confession of it.

He's not talking to himself here, he's talking to God, woe is me. He said, I'm a man of unclean lips, I'm undone, I'm falling apart. He's making his confession to God.

[ 28:15 ] And beloved, if change is going to occur, then really, realization needs to be followed by confession. It's one thing being aware of sin, but if we want something done about it, we have to make that confession and to God because it's against him that we sin.

It's a challenge to his holiness and his loving and legitimate authority. In the lay of Isaiah's confession, God makes provision for his sin to be forgiven, his guilt to be purged.

One of the seraphim takes a coal from the fire, touches his lips, the very place from which the sin is given expression. His guilt is taken away, his sin is atoned for. In other words, he is now at that point at one with this holy God who has revealed himself to us.

I want to say a couple of things about this picture we have because I believe that God discloses our sin to us not so that he can condemn us because without Christ we are already condemned, but so that we can make our confession and be cleansed from our sin which is atoned for, not through the touching of coal but through the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son.

this is an Old Testament picture of what the New Testament fully paints through Christ. And so God will convict us of our sin in order that we can realize and recognize it and make our confession that God might forgive us our sin and bring us back to that place of atonement, if you like, atonement, where we are aligned again with the heart and with the intention of Almighty God.

[29:52] And so beloved, I want to say to you tonight, if God is convicting you of some sin in your life, it's because he wants you to be rid of it. He wants you to seek his forgiveness so that you can then be truly at peace with this God of majesty and glory and holiness that we have revealed to us.

So what's the result of all this? Because there's one more important picture. Before we close, and it follows on from what we just said, it's the result of confession and forgiveness because here now, Isaiah is in a place to hear the voice of God.

God says, whom shall I send? Who will go for us? Again, in my personal view, not an expression of Trinity, but a plural of majesty because that is the context. God has something which needs done.

This is disclosed later, but he needs someone to do it. And Isaiah is now in a place where he's able to hear the voice of God. He's able to hear, as it were, God's self reflection and in response makes himself available for the will and the purpose of God.

Here am I. He says, send me. When I'm trying to put this together, I had this image in my mind that took me back to my primary school days, which were, that has to be said, a long while ago.

[31:12] But the teacher would ask a question and you were the only one who knew the answer to that. And you would sit there and your hand would be up here and you, miss, me, miss, miss.

Did you ever do that? Or was I the only dipstick? And it's a bit like that. As soon as God, as soon as Isaiah hears God's self reflection, whom shall I send?

Who will go for us? Isaiah is going, hear him. I'm here. Please send me. And I believe that there are some real conclusions to be had on this.

And I believe that one of the conclusions is that if we are harboring sin in our lives, I don't mean, you know, if we have committed sin, I mean if we are actively harboring sin in our lives, then our testimony will likely be that we're not hearing anything from God.

And maybe if you're here tonight and your testimony is that you're not hearing anything at all from God, you may want to ask yourself the question, am I actively harboring sin in my life that blocks the voice of God from penetrating to the depths of my being?

[ 32:21 ] The voice of God might be silent to you. And when God speaks, it's to convict you of your sin that it might be dealt with so that you're at one with God and a place to hear his voice calling for service.

And when we come to that place where God draws us back to himself through the confession of our son, we hear the voice of God, we are then able to say, here am I Lord, send me. Because I believe that we serve God from and with pure hearts.

Doesn't mean we're perfect, but we're looking to have pure hearts. As the writer said, Lord, create within me a clean heart and renew a right spirit within me.

So here's a couple of questions for you. Do we have a skewed view of God this evening? Loving his love but ignoring his absolute holiness and majesty?

Is there sin in our lives that we need to confess and be at one with God through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ? Are we at one with God but are terrified to embark on what God is calling us to?

do we have a love for you? Then I believe that God is here amongst us by his spirit, seeking to draw us to himself, enabling us by that same spirit to reckon with him, to have dealt with anything that needs to be dealt with, that we may be able to walk in harmony with him, in his will and in his purpose, and always and only for his honour and for his glory.

Let's pray. God Almighty, we thank you for this revelation of yourself that you gave to the prophet Isaiah that's recorded here for us in this book in the Old Testament.

We thank you that you are indeed a God of majesty and a God of glory, a God of absolute holiness. We thank you that you are the God who reveals our sin to us in the light of your holiness, that we might make our confession and be restored and renewed through your love by the power of your Holy Spirit and because of the sacrifice of your only begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, on the cross.

Help us, Lord, to listen for your voice, to look for your revelation. Help us, Lord, not to be so caught up with our own agenda that we fail to seek you on a daily basis.

Help us to be, Lord, who you've called us to be as your children and all that for your honour and glory. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and our only Saviour.

[35:11] Amen. Our closing praise is Psalm 67, page 84 in the book. Psalm 67.

God, be merciful and bless us. Shine upon us with your face, that the earth may know your actions and all lands your saving grace. We'll stand as we give God our praise.

God, be merciful and bless us.

Shine upon us with your face, that the earth may know your actions, and all lands your saving grace.

O God, may the people's praise you may, all people sing your praise.

[36:27] For you judge them nations justly, really over every ways.

May they sing with joy and gladness, may they all rejoice as one.

O God, may the people's praise you, as they all unite in song.

God, may the people's praise you, as they all unite in song.

abroad. God, our God, will surely bless us. All the earth will fear our God.

[37:48]	And then may grace and mercy and peace from God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit be your experience now and always. Amen. Have a great week, family. God bless you.