



SCRIPTURE:

Isaiah 6:1-6

SERMON NOTES:

SPROUL'S PRAYER

“Our Father and our God, we have such a minute understanding of who you are. Our knowledge of thee is simply a drop in a vast, cosmic ocean, and we look to the day when we will see you face to face. And then we will experience what Isaiah tasted here in this account. And we pray now in this hour that by your Spirit you would speak through this word, not only to our minds but also to our souls. For we ask it in Jesus’ name. Amen.”

INTRODUCTION

It was not a coincidence that Isaiah saw the Lord on His throne the year that King Uzziah died. Israel was in the midst of a national crisis, because the king they knew and trusted for more than 50 years is now dead. Any time a beloved leader leaves or dies, the people are left wondering, what will we do now? Who will lead us? It was in that moment that Isaiah saw the King seated on His throne.

The prophet said the train of His robe filled the temple. I don’t know if you have ever watched a royal wedding. My wife loves that kind of stuff—the pageantry, the beauty, the elegance is attractive. When the bride walks the aisle, you will notice that her dress is so long that there is usually a young woman walking behind her about 6 six feet holding the train of her dress. Historically, the longer the train was, the more prestige the bride had. Isaiah says, the train of the Lord’s royal robe was so long and glorious, it filled the temple.

And it wasn’t just the Lord that he saw. The prophet also saw angelic characters called seraphim. These heavenly creatures have one job. They fly in the presence of God crying out day and night, **“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!”** God is so holy that these creatures, though they have 6 wings, they can only use one set to fly, because with the other four wings they must cover their face and feet. They can’t even look upon God because of His majesty.

And then, God speaks! His voice shakes the temple. I remember one time I was at my brother's shop in Indianapolis. He and his employees were installing 6 giant subwoofers in the back of a GMC Suburban. It was literally a wall of bass. I went to the bathroom and the next thing I know, they turned that system on, and the walls began to shake and the shelves in the bathroom began to fall. Can you imagine the instability Isaiah must have felt in the temple's foundations when God almighty spoke in His presence?

It wasn't just the temple that trembled. Isaiah trembled in fear. ***“Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!”*** Isaiah pronounces judgment upon himself. Woe is me! He says, I am lost. I am undone because I am in the presence of the holy one.

Something R.C. taught me about this passage is the usage of repetition. Whenever we want to draw special attention to something we're writing, we have ways of creating emphasis. We might underline a sentence, italicize it, or add an exclamation point. The Jews had methods to create emphasis too, and it was through repetition. So, when you see something repeated in Scripture, that's why. Jesus did this all the time in his ministry. He would begin sentences by saying, “Truly, Truly, I say to you.” Which meant, you better pay attention. When the apostle Paul warned the Galatians about the dangers of receiving a false gospel, he said two times that if anyone preached a different message, let them be anathema. Let them be damned.

Listen to RC,

“Ladies and gentlemen, there's only one attribute of God that is ever raised to the third degree of repetition in Scripture. There's only one characteristic of almighty God that is communicated in the superlative degree, from the mouths of angels, where the Bible doesn't simply say that God is holy or even that He's holy, holy but that He is holy, holy, holy. The Bible doesn't say that God is mercy, mercy, mercy or love, love, love or justice, justice, justice or wrath, wrath, wrath. But that He is holy, holy, holy.”

EARLY LIFE

Robert Charles Sproul was born in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, on February 13th, 1939. R.C. grew up an avid Steelers and Pirates fan. Sports were a big part of his life. One his favorite stories to tell from his childhood was about his time playing little league. Except it wasn't really little league. R.C. was in sixth grade and played against highschoolers and men in their early 20's.

Sproul was such a good shortstop that he was traded for three boys, all older than him. The trade made local news. The paper said the three were traded for “slick-fielding infielder, Sonny Sproul...who lacked a potential bat.” R.C. loved that story, but the comment about his bat didn’t sit well with him. The next game, he hit a single and homerun off a 20-year-old pitcher.

R.C. excelled in sports to the point he was offered a baseball scholarship from the University of Pittsburgh. But he turned that down to take an athletic scholarship from Westminster College to play basketball and football. It was at Westminster R.C. came to know the Lord.

SPROUL’S CONVERSION

One weekend at Westminster, R.C. and his friend Johnny Coles planned to travel to Youngstown Ohio because the bars there didn’t check IDs. But before they left campus, R.C. realized he was out of cigarettes. So, he went back into the lobby of his dorm to buy a pack of Lucky Strikes from the vending machine. As he was putting his quarter in the machine, a group of football players motioned for R.C. to sit down with them at the table. They were studying the Bible. For over an hour they talked with R.C. about the wisdom of God from Ecclesiastes. Then R.C. laid his eyes on 11:3 which says this, **“If a tree falls to the south or to the north, in the place where the tree falls, there it will lie.”** When R.C. read that verse, he was stunned. He saw himself as that dead, rotting, and decaying tree. He wouldn’t make it to the bars that night. Instead, he went up to his dorm room and cried out to God for mercy.

Here’s how R.C. describes that moment, *“I went up to my bedroom that night and got on my knees, my experience was one of transcendent forgiveness. And I was overwhelmed by the tender mercy of God, the sweetness of His grace, and the awakening He gave me for my life.”*

R.C. frequently said that he believes he was the only person in the history of the church converted by that verse.

SPROUL’S SECOND CONVERSION

After his conversion, R.C. devoted himself to study and in the providence of God was placed under solid biblical teachers. Then would come his second awakening—this time to the holiness of God. One night in his dorm room, R.C. couldn’t sleep. His mind was racing. He felt compelled to leave the room.

It was the winter of 1958. It had snowed all day. R.C. walked across campus to the chapel. He remembers the eerie sound of silence as he trekked through the snow. When he entered the chapel, he walked the aisle and knelt at the altar.

I will let R.C. tell you what happened next,

“I knelt at that place and had a sensation of a foreboding loneliness. I sensed that I was absolutely alone. And then almost in an instant, I was overcome by the sense of another presence. It was almost tangible. It was like I could reach out and touch the massive presence of God. I just knelt there and basked in this sensation of being in the presence of God.”

After his conversion, R.C. fell in love with Jesus and studying the Bible. But it was in this moment, he had an awakening to the majesty of God the Father. He goes on to say, “I knew in that hour that I had tasted of the holy grail. Within me was born a new thirst that could never be satisfied in this world...I found a refuge, a haven, a sanctuary where I could be still and know that he was God. A holy God.”

MARRIAGE, SEMINARY, AND REFORMED THEOLOGY

That same year, R.C.'s girlfriend Vesta also committed her life to Christ. In June of 1960 they would marry and have two children—Sherrie and R.C. jr.

R.C. went on to seminary where he studied under the infamous John Gerstner. Gerstner was a conservative Calvinist at a liberal school. And, at first, R.C. strongly opposed Reformed Theology.

He comments, “I challenged Gerstner in the classroom time after time, making a total pest of myself. I resisted (Reformed Theology) for well over a year. My final surrender came in stages. Painful stages. It started when I began work as a student pastor in a church. I wrote a note to myself that I kept on my desk in a place where I could always see it.”

YOU ARE REQUIRED TO BELIEVE, TO PREACH, AND TO TEACH WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS IS TRUE, NOT WHAT YOU WANT THE BIBLE TO SAY IS TRUE.

“The note haunted me. My final crisis came in my senior year. I had a three-credit course in the study of Jonathan Edwards. We spent the semester studying Edwards’s most

famous book, The Freedom of the Will, under Gerstner's tutelage. At the same time, I had a Greek exegesis course in the book of Romans. I was the only student in that course, one on one with the New Testament professor. There was nowhere I could hide. The combination was too much for me. Gerstner, Edwards, the New Testament professor, and above all the apostle Paul, were too formidable a team for me to withstand."

LIGONIER MINISTRIES

R.C. would go on to be a pastor and seminary professor. But his true calling emerged when he was approached by some Christian leaders who proposed they start a study center outside of Pittsburgh. This was the beginning of Ligonier ministries (Recommended Resource).

Ligonier was a place where students could stay onsite and learn from Dr. Sproul and his staff. Teaching happened all week long both formally and informally. The mission, passion, and purpose of R.C. Sproul's life was the same as Ligonier Ministries, *'to proclaim the holiness of God in all its fullness to as many people as possible.'* He saw his work as filling a gap between Sunday School and seminary, helping Christian laypeople renew their minds as they learned Christian doctrine, ethics, and apologetics, all in the service of living life Coram Deo —before the face of God."

This birthed R.C.'s writing and speaking career. He would go on to write or edit over 60 books. The most influential book Sproul ever wrote was the Holiness of God. But he says the book that has changed more people's minds than any other is Chosen by God.

SPROUL, THE TEACHER

This is a good point to say a word about the character of R.C. Sproul's teaching. R.C. was not only gifted, but he was also enjoyable. He taught the Bible with noticeable joy and a smile on his face. He was winsome, funny, serious, passionate, convicting and most of all clear in his presentation.

One time Sproul had a conversation with an atheistic evolutionary scientist. R.C. asked the man to explain the theory of evolution in detail. The man told Dr. Sproul that theory was too complicated to explain. Sproul said, *"if it's too complicated to explain then you don't understand it."* That highlights perhaps the most important aspect of Sproul's teaching abilities. He could take complex topics and communicate in a manner every

believer could understand. He once said, *“To simplify without distorting is the highest task of a scholar.”*

One thing that set Sproul apart was his use of the chalkboard. Even when technology offered better alternatives, R.C. loved to use the chalkboard while teaching.

R.C. once said, “I remember once I was lecturing in college and my mind went blank—because I didn’t use notes, or very few notes in those lectures—and I didn’t know where I was. So I turned around and walked over to the blackboard—at that point, it was blank—and I took the chalk and wrote a long line and then put an exclamation point at the end of it. I turned around and said to the class, *“Do you know what that means?”* And they looked at me with dumbfounded bewilderment. I said: *“Let me tell you what it means. It means I forgot where I was, and I had to do something, so I just wrote this line on the blackboard. But now I remember, so we can continue.”*

BATTLEGROUND THEOLOGIAN

Biblical Inerrancy

If R.C. had his own way, he would have been an ivory tower scholar, locked away reading and writing. But he knew that the most impactful theologians throughout church history were those men who brought their faith to the culture.

Sproul was described as a battleground theologian. He was known as a strong defender of the faith. Several moments in his life bring this point out, but I will name a few. The first would be R.C.’s defense of the inerrancy of Scripture. In 1973, Ligonier held a conference on the Inspiration and Authority of Scripture. Speakers at the conference included John Gerstner, J. I. Packer, John Frame, and Clark Pinnock. R.C. penned the Ligonier Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, which became the 1978 Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy. The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy is still referred to today by pastors and theologians as the standard for biblical inspiration.

Justification by Faith Alone

Another significant stand R.C. took for truth was in 1994 when a document emerged entitled *Evangelicals and Catholics Together*. This document attempted to state that when it came to the gospel, Evangelicals (us) and Roman Catholics were finally unified around gospel. Two of R.C.’s closest friends—Chuck Colson and JI Packer—signed the document. R.C. knew nothing about it until he received a phone call from a reporter ready to break the story. He read R.C. some of the key passages in the document and

immediately R.C. could see the problems. Evangelicals and Catholics did not believe the same gospel.

The issue had to do with sola fide—that we are justified by faith alone in Christ alone. The document nowhere clarified this essential teaching, and Sproul contended that because God is holy, the only way we can be right before a righteous God is if we receive the righteousness of Jesus Christ by faith alone. Christ’s righteousness—not our own—must be imputed to us by faith. Rome maintained its teaching that, yes, we’re saved by grace through faith in Christ, but the righteousness we need is achieved by our merit. Faith is necessary, but insufficient. Sproul fought for the biblical gospel that we are justified by faith alone in Christ alone and declared righteous on the basis of Jesus’ righteousness imputed to us and not our own. This stand cost Sproul his friendships with both Packer and Colson.

Apologetics

Another significant contribution worth noting was Sproul’s commitment to apologetics. He was strong in the school of classical apologetics which focuses on natural theology and its ability to prove the existence of God.

Sproul said, “We need to reconstruct the classical synthesis by which natural theology bridges the special revelation of Scripture and the general revelation of nature. Such a reconstruction could end the war between science and theology. The thinking person could embrace nature without embracing naturalism. All of life, in its unity and diversity, could be lived Coram Deo, before the face of God, under His authority and to his glory.”

Sproul also loved to defend the Bible. If someone said there were contradictions, he would sit down with that person and resolve their objections one by one. When they ran out of objections, he showed them alleged contradictions and solved those too.

ST. ANDREWS CHAPEL

In 1997, Sproul became the pastor of a small congregation called St. Andrews Chapel. Of all the ministry and teaching R.C. had already accomplished, he called his preaching ministry at St. Andrews *“the highlight of my life.”* One of the biggest regrets of his life was that he waited until he was 58 years old to preach the word of God every week.

R.C. would preach his final sermon at St. Andrews on November 26th, 2017. His text was Hebrews 2. “How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation.” After the message, his wife Vesta said, *“You can die now, sweetheart. That was the best sermon*

you ever preached.” They joked like that often, but what Vesta didn’t realize was that that was R.C.’s last sermon. Later that week he was hospitalized with Pneumonia and would later die on December 14th, 2017. On his tombstone it reads. R.C. Sproul. Feb. 13th, 1939-Dec. 14th, 2017. He was a kind man, Redeemed by a Kinder Savior.

1. Preach the Gospel

R.C. was a preacher, teacher, and defender of the gospel. When teaching the book of Romans, he would often look at Paul’s opening words that he had been set that he had not only been called to be an apostle, but “separated to the gospel of God.” Sproul loved to point out that the gospel is not just a message about God, but it is God’s gospel. He’s the owner and originator of the gospel and we dare not change it!

The doctrine he was most concerned about clarifying and defending when it came to the gospel was the doctrine of justification. One could argue that this was the doctrine that characterized his ministry more than anything else.

When R.C. taught on justification, he frequently did so by contrasting the Roman Catholic view with the Protestant view of justification. We teach that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Rome would agree that grace and faith are necessary for salvation but not sufficient. One also needs actual righteousness that he produces in order to be declared just before God.

This is when we saw R.C. at his best and most passionate. He proclaimed that justification by faith alone was simply shorthand for justification by Christ alone—that the only way we can stand before the tribunal of a holy God and not be condemned is if we receive the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

It was this doctrine that led R.C. to what he considered his most important book—a children’s book called, **The Priest with Dirty Clothes**. The story is about a newly ordained priest. After his ordination, he receives his priestly robes and his first assignment. He gets to preach his first sermon to the King. The priest can’t wait! Finally, Sunday comes, and he begins to make his way to the King’s castle. But on his way, the priest accidentally gets mud all over his brand-new robes. There isn’t enough time to clean them. So, he must go to the castle filthy. When he arrives, the court jester sees the priest and begins to accuse him. “You can’t stand before the King looking that way.” The people stare at him. Finally, the priest stands before the King to give his sermon, but the King stops him. “The jester is right,” says the King. “I cannot allow you to stand in my presence with such filthy clothing. I will give you another chance. Come back next week

to preach your sermon, but you better have clean robes on.” The priest leaves and immediately tries to find a solution. He goes to the bishop and asks for a new set of robes, but the bishop says you only get one. Then the priest goes to the town cleaner and the cleaner spends three days trying to clean his robes but he’s unable. He tells the priest that his robes are ruined. “What am I to do?” asks the priest. The cleaner told him to go to the Prince. He can help. So, the priest goes to the palace of the great prince. The priest has heard of the prince. He’s the Son of the King. The prince is very kind and agrees to help the priest. He says, go back to my father’s castle next Sunday and be prepared to preach your sermon. I will be there to help you. “But what about my clothes?” asks the Priest. Trust me, said the Prince. So, the next Sunday the priest did as the prince said. He went to the castle of the king dressed in his filthy robes. Like last time, the jester ridiculed the priest for his filthy garments. “What are you doing? You can’t stand before the King dressed like that!?” The King looked at the priest and said, “I told you that you cannot stand before me looking like that? Why did you come back with your filthy clothes on again?” At just that time, the prince came walking in. He wore a beautiful robe that drew everyone’s attention. He approached the priest and said, remove your robe. The priest did as the prince said. The prince then took off his robe and put it on the priest. He said, “Now, you’re ready to preach your sermon. And whenever you come back here to stand before my father, you can wear my robe. That way you will be worthy to stand before the King.” The Jester was silent, and the King was pleased, because the priest was clothed with the robes of His Son.

Ladies and gentlemen, the only way we can ever hope to stand before a holy God is if we are clothed in the righteousness of His Son. Our best deeds are but rags, but Christ qualifies us to stand in the presence of the King.

2. Seek to know God.

One of R.C.’s biggest concerns for the church was that we don’t know who God is. In fact, one time he was sitting on a panel when he received a question that set him off. Instead of me telling you what happened, let me show you.

We don’t know who God is! We don’t truly understand the holiness of God and our own sinfulness. When we have the audacity to think, let alone say, that God is not merciful enough or patient enough with us, we show that we have no idea who God truly is.

As I mentioned earlier, R.C.’s most well-known book is the Holiness of God. In that book, he takes us to 1 Chronicles 13, to the story of Uzzah and ark. If you know the story, the Israelites lost the ark of Covenant to Philistines, but were able to recapture during the

reign of David. The Ark was the most sacred object in all of Israel. It was considered the throne of God, made of Acacia wood and covered with pure gold. Four rings were fastened to the ark so poles could be inserted so the Levites could carry the ark without having to touch it. The final resting place for the ark was to be in the holy of holies in the temple.

When the Israelites re-captured the ark, instead of carrying it like they should have, they placed the ark on a cart that was pulled by oxen.

7 And they carried the ark of God on a new cart, from the house of Abinadab, and Uzzah and Ahio were driving the cart. 8 And David and all Israel were celebrating before God with all their might, with song and lyres and harps and tambourines and cymbals and trumpets. 9 And when they came to the threshing floor of Chidon, Uzzah put out his hand to take hold of the ark, for the oxen stumbled. 10 And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah, and he struck him down because he put out his hand to the ark, and he died there before God.”

What was Uzzah’s sin? What did this man do that warranted the death penalty from almighty God? Wasn’t he just trying to steady the ark, so it didn’t fall into the mud? Here’s what Sproul says about this account.

The law of God says that *“Not only was Uzzah forbidden to touch the ark, he was forbidden even to look at it. HE touched it anyway...Uzzah assumed that his hand was less polluted than the earth.”*

Friends, if that story offends you, let me speak on behalf of RC. “What’s wrong with you people?” God is holy. And we are not. And this is why we need a substitute. This was another feature of R.C.’s teaching ministry. Because God is holy and we are sinful, we need a substitute. We need a mediator. We need a redeemer who can restore us back to God and that man is only Jesus Christ.

3. Reformed Theology

It’s no secret that R.C. Sproul was a Reformed Theologian. He unashamedly taught the doctrines of grace, but he wasn’t combative or rude. He disseminated reformation doctrine with joy.

Personally speaking, the book that created in me a theological hunger and love for reformed theology was Sproul’s book Chosen by God. It was 2010, the day before I got

married. Pastor Erik drove to Indianapolis from Nashville to perform the wedding and stay the night at my house. We spent 24 hours talking theology, and Pastor Erik unloaded on me all the doctrines of grace. Knowing that I couldn't possibly process everything he told me, Pastor Erik sent me *Chosen by God* by R.C. Sproul. That book forever convinced that salvation is based completely on the electing grace of God.

Sproul frequently addressed the charge that unconditional election was unfair. To illustrate his response, he would often use his chalkboard to draw this picture (on screen), and he would make comments like this: "His justice is perfect justice. However, God does not always act with justice. Sometimes He acts with mercy. Mercy is not justice, but it is not injustice. Injustice violates righteousness. Mercy manifests kindness and grace and does no violence to righteousness. We may see non-justice in God, which is mercy, but we never see injustice in God."

Do you see what Sproul is saying? When it comes to the sovereign grace of God in election, R.C. is simply echoing the Apostle Paul in Romans 9 when the Lord says, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy."

Friends, if you're here this morning, and have trusted in Jesus Christ for salvation, it is because God in Heaven decided to have mercy upon you. And if someone perishes for all eternity, God has done them no wrong, but shown them the justice they deserve.

CONCLUSION

If you're here today and not a Christian, listen to R.C.'s closing words from the last sermon he preached.

"If you neglect what Jesus says and what God proves, then we are back to the theme: no escape. Beloved, if you come to church every single Sunday of your life and go to Sunday school every single week of your life, you may still be neglecting this great salvation. Is your heart in it? That is what I am asking you. I cannot answer that question for you. You know if you are neglecting your salvation. I do not have to tell it to you. I just have to tell you what the consequences are if you continue in that neglect. So, I pray with all my heart that God will awaken each one of us today to the sweetness, the loveliness, the glory of the gospel declared by Christ."

SPROUL'S FINAL PASTORAL PRAYER

"We thank O Jesus that you are for us the great escape. We're thankful that because of you and for what you've done for us, we have nothing to fear from the wrath that is to

come. But we pray, God, that you would feed our souls. Cause us to hunger and thirst after you as the deer pants after the mountain stream. Ignite a flame in our hearts, that we may not neglect you, but pursue you with everything that we have. For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen."

REVIEW:

- ❖ Read Isaiah 6:1-6
- ❖ What is the importance of the robe of the LORD filling the whole temple?
- ❖ Why did the seraphim have to cover their face and feet?
- ❖ Why is holy repeated three times in verse 3?
- ❖ What was the realization that Isaiah had in verse 5?

REFLECT:

- ❖ Why was RC so passionate about faith alone through Christ alone?
- ❖ Why was Uzzah struck down for touching the ark?

RESPOND:

- ❖ What are you doing to grow in your understanding of the holiness of God?
- ❖ How are you living in light of that understanding?

MEDITATE:

- ❖ Isaiah 6:3 - *And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!"*

MEMORIZE:

- ❖ Ephesians 2:8-9 - *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

PRAYER FOCUS:

- ❖ Kids Director - **Laurie DiCicco**
- ❖ Ministry - **Kids Ministry**
- ❖ **Pray for our long-term families:**
 - The Wilsons
 - The Grays
 - The Starks (departing in October)
- ❖ **Pray for our mid-term sent ones:**
 - Kaesi
- ❖ **Pray for our short-term teams:**
 - Central Asia team departs in September
- ❖ **Pray for the lost - Unreached People Group (UPG):** Eritrean Tigre in United
 - **Population in country:** 15,000
 - **Global population:** 843,300

- **Christian Adherent:** 0.10%
- **Evangelical:** 0.00%
- **Primary Religion:** Islam
- **Primary Language:** Tigre
- **Summary:** The Eritreans compose one of the smaller immigrant groups from Africa living in the United Kingdom. The Tigre are one of the largest Eritrean people group living there, second only to the Tigrinya. They speak Tigre as well as English. Many have left their nomadic lives in Eritrea for a better life abroad. They first arrived in the early 1960s when the Eritreans went to war with Ethiopia for Eritrean independence. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, more Eritrean immigrants arrived just before Eritrea gained her independence from Ethiopia. Eritrea has had major economic problems, and more Eritreans have applied to live in the United Kingdom in recent times.
- **Prayer Focus:** Pray that the problems in Eritrea would cause the Tigre to give their lives to Jesus Christ. Pray that Eritrean Christians in the United Kingdom would proclaim the gospel message to the Tigre there.
- Want to keep up with other Unreached People Groups? Download the Unreached of the Day App
<https://joshuaproject.net/pray/unreachedoftheday/app>