

The Holiness of God

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[0:00] Well, last week we did talk about the greatness of God, and this morning we are going to talk about His holiness, the holiness of God. One of the most majestic, one of the most favorite, one of the favorite hymns of the church is the hymn, Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty.

Early in the morning our song will rise to Thee. It's a traditional hymn, but even people who prefer contemporary music listen to it and enjoy it because there's something majestic about it, and it does raise our hearts up to the transcendent, majestic God.

Holy, Holy, Holy, all the saints adore Thee, casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea, cherubim and seraphim falling down before Thee, who wert and art and evermore shall be. Holy, Holy, Holy, though the darkness hide Thee, though the eye of sinful man Thy glory may not see, only Thou art holy.

There is none beside Thee, perfect in power and love and dignity and purity. Now, what's the book, what's the chapter that that hymn is taken from?

[1:31] Isaiah, Isaiah 6. Let's turn there in our Bibles to Isaiah chapter 6. Isaiah chapter 6. Isaiah 6.

And we'll just read the first three verses here. 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. Above Him were seraphs, each with six wings. With two wings they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another, Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord Almighty. The whole earth is full of His glory.

Holy. Now, the Hebrew, when they want to emphasize something, they use repetition. So in Genesis 2, when the Lord says, If you eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, then what will happen?

[2:47] You will surely die. Literally, it's you will die, die. You will definitely die. In Genesis 37, Joseph's brothers tell Jacob that Joseph has been torn to pieces by wild animals.

And literally, he's been torn, torn. So there's torn up, and then there's torn, torn up. That's what's happened to Joseph. A rather amusing use is in Genesis 14, where the plains around Sodom and Gomorrah are filled with pit pits.

And we don't know exactly how to translate that, but you get the idea. There's regular pits, and then there's these pits. They're really the worst, the big, nastiest pits of all.

Jesus would say, verily, verily. Amen, amen. Truly, truly. So he's emphasizing the truthfulness of what he is saying, because it's going to be hard to believe.

So he's going to do it with this double, this emphasis. But in Isaiah 6, we have one of the only two situations in the Bible where something is repeated three times, and it's both, and both times it's the holiness of God.

[4:06] Holy, holy, holy. And so that takes God's holiness right off the scale. So if you have pits, and you've got pit pits, if you were to triple it, it would be to say these are the greatest of all pits.

Well, holy, holy, holy. It's taking it right off the scale. It expresses the superlative degree. So here's everything and everyone, and they're all maybe in a continuum of smallest things, the greatest things.

And then completely off the scale, on the other side, is God. He's not a part of even the same scale. He's not a part of this chain of being.

The medieval people like to talk about the chain of being from the smallest to the greatest. Well, God isn't even on the scale. He's so high above it. But he alone is holy.

It's like saying, yes, we can call men holy. We are called the holy ones, saints. But God alone is holy.

[5:21] There's a difference. And so none of his other attributes get that three-fold treatment. Never power, power, power, or love, love, love, or wise, wise, wise.

But two times in the Bible, we hear the seraph, the seraphim around the throne saying, holy, holy, holy. So we should take note of this. So why is his holiness different?

Why is his holiness in a different category than even all of his other attributes? Well, because really, his holiness is the summation of all of his attributes.

When you put perfect love and perfect wisdom and perfect grace and perfect kindness and perfect patience and perfect justice and perfect righteousness and perfect righteousness and perfect every other virtue that the Lord possesses.

When you put all of those together, that's why God is holy. So every one of his other attributes is holy.

[6:24] And when you put all of his attributes together, that makes him holy, holy, holy. Edward Young, an Old Testament scholar, he was an Old Testament scholar at Westminster Seminary, wrote this.

Holy in Isaiah 6, 5, signifies the entirety, the entirety, the whole of the divine perfection, which separates God from his creation.

And I think that is probably the heart of what it means that God is holy. It's his divine perfection that separates him. From his creation.

So holiness is the entirety of the divine perfection. It's a perfection that sets him totally apart from us. And so one way to think about holiness, one way to define it, is exalted perfection.

So if something is perfect, that's one thing. But God is exalted in his perfection. His perfections take him right above all of creation.

[7:34] It's perfection to the highest degree. It's an infinite perfection that separates him from others. Not just from sinners. Not just from the creation of this earth.

But from everything else. From the highest angels. He is far separated from them because he is so perfect. So Exodus 15. The Israelites have come through the Red Sea.

They've seen the judgment of God on the Egyptians. They've seen the salvation of God for them. And they sang, who among the gods is like you?

Oh, Lord. Who is like you? Majestic in holiness. So who is like you? And the answer is no one. And what separates him? He's majestic in holiness. So it's a perfection. God's perfection.

[8:33] That lifts him above every comparison. That lifts him above every comparison. It certainly separates him from sinners.

The hymn says, The eye of sinful man, thy glory may not see. But it's a perfection that separates him even from the highest of his creations.

That's what I was just saying. It's not that God's holiness just separates him from sinners. Or that God's holiness just separates him from man. His holiness separates him even from the highest of creations.

So it definitely seems from, we don't know a lot about angelic society, so to speak, or different angelic beings, the heavenly creation. But the Bible does paint this picture of, there are lesser angels and greater angels.

And there are the archangels. And then there are cherubim and seraphim. And those two seem to be at the very top, because they are the ones who are closest to God.

[9:44] They are God's personal guardians, personal attendants, personal worshipers, his personal singers. And in Isaiah, the seraphim are the ones, the ones who are the highest in all of creation, are the ones who are covering their eyes, and covering their feet.

And they're the ones singing, holy, holy, holy is the Lord God almighty. And so these ones, that if any of us saw them, we would absolutely be terrified.

I mean, we've seen angels, and the knack is, we fall down in worship. But if we were to see them, haul them much more.

But these are the ones who, why are they covering their eyes? Why are they covering their feet? What do you guys think? Why are they doing that?

Because of the holiness of the Lord. Yeah. And they would probably die if they faced God with their eyes.

[10:58] Part of it, Jim. And then, the feet are probably covered because what the Lord told Moses was when he ran into the burning bush. The ground they were standing on. It was holy, right? The

feet signified their creations.

Their created beings. And, and so it's out of this deep sense of, of the majestic holiness of God, and really a deep sense of shame.

And there can be a shame without sin. A shame of, of my beauty compared to his beauty. My glory compared to his glory. And, so they're covering their feet and their eyes out of a sense of, I'm not worthy to see him.

I'm not worthy to be here. Revelation 15 is an echo of Exodus 15. And, it's interesting. It's the song of the, it's, in Revelation 15, it's called the Song of Moses and the Song of the Lamb.

And, it's sort of like, you know, how jazz musicians, like, take a theme and then they, whatever, they change it and adapt it and they make it sort of their own.

[12:09] Well, in Revelation 15, they're taking the, the Old Testament Song of Moses and now they're, they're not beside the Red Sea. They, they are beside a different Red Sea.

It's a sea of glass that had the appearance of fire. And, it's all of the people who, uh, have been delivered out of, uh, this world.

And, they're singing the Song of Moses again, but this time they're singing it because they've come through the Lamb and through the death and the resurrection of the Lamb. and it says in Revelation 15, who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name for you alone are holy.

So, the Seraphim know that God is holy. And, all the people who are saved know that God is alone holy.

And so, God's holiness puts them in a category of one. A category of one. Exalted above all.

[13:13] And, He alone belongs there and the creation bows down before Him. Say, holy, holy, holy. Now, when this gets to us, maybe you're feeling like something that I was feeling as I'm just preparing and I'm writing this stuff down and putting it together, that you start to feel something of Psalm 46:10.

Be still and know that I am God. There's something, there's something just about knowing that He's God.

and everything else isn't. I am God. That's the fear of the Lord. Be still and know that I am God. Ecclesiastes, guard your steps when you go to the house of God.

Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifices of fools. Go near to listen rather than offer the sacrifices of fools who do not know what they do is wrong.

Do not be quick with your mouth. Do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. And here's the reason why we need to be still, circumspect, careful with our mouths and our words and our hearts because God is in heaven and you are on earth.

[14:40] So let your words be few. Now the reason we take that time sometimes in our morning worship to be still, to calm ourselves, is not to be austere.

It's not to be joyless. It's not to be anything like that but God's majesty, God's glory, God's holiness should permeate our worship because we're not worshipping a superhero version of ourselves.

we're not worshipping our buddy. God is perfect in a way that is completely foreign to us.

He's not like us and he, that should make us fear him. And we aren't thinking right if at least something of Isaiah's terror does not wind its way through our worship and through our experience of God, our relationship with God.

It should include that kind of fear. It's not just respect. It's not just awe. God is not like us and he comes among us and he's holy, holy, holy.

[16:01] He's a consuming fire and he holds the waters of the whole world in the hollow of his hand and he marks off the heavens with his hand and he knows every word that's going to come off my tongue before I even say it.

R.C. Sproul uses the word transcendence. Transcendence. So here's everything else and this transcends. Sometimes we talk about athletes that transcend their sport.

So for a while, I don't know the dates now, like it was like Tiger Woods transcended the sport of golf. Like here was everyone else and here was Tiger Woods and everyone was hoping that he just had a bad day because if he had a good day, he was going to win.

Transcendence. So it means it's above and beyond. When we speak of the transcendence of God, we are talking about that sense in which God is above and beyond us.

It tries to get at his supreme and altogether greatness. Transcendence describes God in his consuming majesty.

[17:10] That's an interesting combination of words. Consuming. Everything about him is majestic but it's also whenever we get near him, we can be consumed by his, we are consumed by his majesty.

His exalted loftiness, it points to the infinite distance that separates him from every creature. A.W. Pink says God is solitary. He's alone, all alone in his majesty. Unique in his excellency. Peerless in his perfections. So I hope you're starting to get a feel for that, for this idea of holy, holy, holy.

It's hard to capture and actually it's really impossible to capture because at best we are going to be using human words. human words to describe something that's not human, that's infinitely above us.

[18:17] And God's holiness is the very essence of God. It's impossible to capture because if we could find words and ideas and concepts that just could corral it and make it clear, perfect crystal clear, then we would have captured and roped in God.

God. And so authors use all these words to try to get something of the idea of what this is. And so just listen to some of the words that we've used.

We've talked about glorious perfection, exalted perfection, his transcendence, his consuming majesty, his unique greatness, his solitary, peerless, infinite glory.

It's his grandeur, his majesty, his dignity, his splendor. And so God's holiness not only separates him from us, from the creation, from the highest creations, God's holiness separates him from sin. And that's the second aspect. Winding its way through this idea of holiness, is the idea of ethical holiness. It's moral purity.

[19:35] Complete and utter moral purity. And so when we talk about growing in holiness, this is what we're talking about. We're not talking about rising above creation.

We're not talking about making ourselves greater than what we are. We are talking about moral purity. But again, here, we have to make a distinction.

This is so important. We have to make this distinction between our moral purity, even at its best, or the moral purity of the highest angels, and God's moral purity.

His purity, His holiness. purity, scale. So, again, if everything is on the scale, here's all the creation from lowest to highest, and here's God completely off the scale, transcendent, majestic in His holiness, and His glory, and His splendor, and His dignity.

He's far, far, infinitely above us. No end to the gap between us. Again, if creature purity is on a scale, then God's purity is off the scale.

[20:51] It can't be measured. Now, even the highest angels have a purity that is finite, have a moral morality, a holiness that is finite, because they are finite.

Now, that's not to say that they sin. Angels, some angels, the majority of the angels, have never sinned. The ones that are dead are demons.

They've never sinned. But the mere fact that they are creatures means that their ethical holiness has a limit.

They are finite in their righteousness. That's not to say they're imperfect. It's to say that they're creatures. They're finite. But God is perfect in moral purity.

He's infinite in moral purity. He's exalted in all of his virtues. Now, when we put that together, his exalted, holy character, our being, and his exalted holiness of his virtues, his moral purity, that combination is what it means that God is holy.

[22:11] Holy, holy. That makes him the God we can serve and we do serve. So let's just think about this. Let's think about, let's suppose something.

Suppose God wasn't ethically infinite. He wasn't perfect in love and righteousness and justice. But let's say that he was just perfect.

He was infinite in his being and his power and his majesty. He might be perfectly wise, but let's just suppose that he just contained a hint of some moral imperfection.

Now, what would that turn him into? If he just had a hint of sin, what would it turn him into? So matched to that just teeny, itty little bit of sin is infinite power and infinite splendor and infinite exaltedness above us.

What would it turn him into? Infinite wickedness. It would make him into a monster, an infinite terror, an infinite monster.

[23:28] God's savior. When we're thinking about the holiness of God, we need to include both aspects of his holiness. That's why we need to include the first part of Isaiah 40 about him being a gentle shepherd and a loving shepherd and a rewarding shepherd and a good shepherd with the rest of Isaiah 40.

Because if all we have is the back half of Isaiah 40, where it's just talking about he marks off the heavens with the breath of his hands and he weighs the mountains and the scales and all of that, then we could never say this is good news that here is your God.

It's the combination that he is so good and he is so great that makes it for good news that we that the Isaiah says now go up on the mountains you who bring good tidings, lift up your voices and shout, say here is your God.

Instead it would be here's your God and wail and cry out. a nightmare runs the universe. It's in the hands of someone who is worse than no God.

He's a terrible horrible tyrant. So Stephen Charnock, the Puritan said, it is a less injury to deny him his being than to deny the purity of it.

[24:47] The one makes him know God, the other a deformed, unlovely, and detestable God. So what Stephen Charnock is saying, it's better to say there's no God at all than to say that he's not absolutely pure.

Does that make sense? Because if he's not absolutely pure, then he's a deformed, unlovely, and detestable God. But what makes God so beautiful and wonderful is that he is absolutely perfect and infinite in his purity.

Again, this is why the cross of Christ, this is why we have to look at God through Jesus Christ and the cross that we can't leave him on the shelf. It's so necessary because only the cross of Christ, only that complete gospel story gives full reign, lets both aspects of God's holiness go.

It's not just that he is all love and all goodness. No, he is infinite in glory. He is infinite in majesty. And the cross holds those things together.

But we need to also, I'm trying to slowly uncover this, but we also need to realize that holiness is more than just the absence of sin. It's more than just the absence of sin.

[26:16] his holiness is, has a, it's infinite in a positive direction. It's infinite in a positive direction.

And so too often we think of holiness as one dimensionally. We think of holiness as I'm not going to do this sin anymore, and if I don't do this sin, I will be holy.

And so when I, a lot of times when I say I want to grow in holiness, what I mean is I want to get the sin out of my life. I'm going to get rid of these sins. But holiness, righteousness, holiness is positive. It actually has content. It's not just the absence of sin, it's the perfect, complete way that God is uncontained, unmeasurable in all of his virtues.

It's not just that God is just. It's that God's justice has no bounds. It's not that just God is kind.

[27:25] God's kindness is infinite. He's infinitely kind. That's one reason Paul says that heaven is going to be so long, forever and ever, because God has more kindness for the sons of men than any time can hold.

And so he says for countless ages to come, he's going to be showing us the kindness of God in Christ Jesus. And perhaps here's where we can go back to Isaiah 40.

Remember, I hope someone went home and measured how much water the hollow of their hand can hold. But if your hand can hold a tablespoon of water, and if that represents my righteousness, my holiness, my justice, my goodness, my kindness, my patience, then the waters covering the whole earth is God's.

If nine and a half inches is the hand breath of my hand, is the hand breath of my goodness, my love, my kindness, my patience, my grace, my faithfulness, well, then the height, and the width, and the length, and the depth of the entire universe is God's righteousness, justice, goodness, kindness, faithfulness, mercy, all the rest.

And so we can't ever come to an end of God's greatness, and neither can we come to an end to God's moral purity. unity. And so it's not that he's just perfect in righteousness and goodness and kindness and love.

[29:17] He's infinite in them. There's no measure to them. There's no end to any of them. And that's why in Isaiah 6, there's hope for Isaiah.

Isaiah. Isaiah. So in verse 4, at the sound of their voices, the doorposts and the thresholds shook, and the temple was filled with smoke.

And 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.

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

So, poor Isaiah says, woe is me, I am a man of unclean lips. And he said, I am ruined, I am undone, I am unraveled.

[30 : 32] The picture is of someone who is taking a knitted sweater and begin pulling it all apart. That's what's happening to poor Isaiah. And he knows instantly his sin.

I'm a man of unclean lips. Now, what do the lips show? What are they a barometer, a thermometer of?

The lips show us what's where? in our heart, right? The overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks.

So, Isaiah's unclean lips, they're a reflection of his unclean heart. So, Isaiah's unclean on the inside, and he's unclean on the outside, and he didn't have any right to be here.

And now he's going to be ruined. And neither do I. And neither do you. But because matching God's infinite majesty is this infinite purity, and all those virtues and goodness that we talked about, God sends an angel with a burning coal from the altar, and he puts it on his lips, and he purifies them.

[31 : 57] Now your sins are atoned for. It was a picture of what was to come. It was a picture of Isaiah 53, where we all like sheep have gone astray.

Each of us has turned to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. It came from the altar, because on the altar the sacrifice was made.

And that's why God could say, your guilt has taken away, your sin atoned for. Now, let's just talk for a second about how we should respond to all this. First response is, this should work humility in us. Not only that my sins are so great, but my righteousness compared to his is so small. And that should make me pause when I start to take pride in what I've done or what I'm doing or something like that.

real humility because I haven't even come close to his love or his righteousness. And then it should turn us to real contrition and a fresh turning to Jesus for cleansing.

[33 : 13] We haven't measured up to God's holiness. Too many times there's been no fear of God before our eyes. We haven't thought about his holiness.

We haven't lived like he's holy. But thankfully there's Jesus that we can turn to. Because at the same time there is this offering.

And it's this majestic, glorious, holy offering. So why does Jesus' blood atone? Why does Jesus' blood save me?

Now why can I enter with confidence into the most holy place? It's because it was not a mere man that died on that cross. It was the son of God.

It was God in the flesh. It was the holy one. And so who obeyed for me? Who obeyed for me? Who obeyed for you?

[34 : 14] Whose righteousness is on your record in heaven? Well, it's Christ's righteousness. righteousness. So think of that. My righteousness in heaven, on the record books in heaven, are as infinite and perfect and majestic as the very righteousness of God, because it is the righteousness of God.

Because it's not mine, it's his. It's his infinite, perfect righteousness. And so to fear God is to embrace both sides of this, to embrace both the justice of God and the grace of God.

It's to believe the gospel in every part, that one, I really need saved, and number two, Jesus Christ has done everything to save me. That there's this corresponding, both halves are balanced, both halves are there.

And so we embrace both sides of the cross. We embrace God's justice and his dignity and his right to have us be obedient, to have us worship him, to love him with all of our hearts and minds and souls and strength.

He has that right. And when we have the fear of God, we embrace that, but we also embrace his love and his grace. He has mercy and kindness to me in Jesus Christ.

[35 : 30] Now that's why the fear of the Lord is something to delight in. Because when we are fearing God, we are seeing God as he really is. And now we actually can have a relationship with a God that really is there.

And we can draw close to him. And so to fear God is to know him. And to fear God is to love him and adore him. So have your heart go out to him with delight.
Well, we are out of time. We're dismissed. We're We're We're We're We're We're We're We're