

The Jealous God

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[0:00] Oprah Winfrey was not always a new age spiritualist seeking to get in touch with her inner consciousness by connecting with the force.

When she was 27 or 28 years old and she was sitting in a congregation much as you're sitting here this morning and listening to what she called a great preacher who is expounding on God's character.

And everybody was into it. And you know how it must have been in a black church when she meant what she meant by that. Everybody was into it. Well, the preacher said how great God was, how omnipotent God was, how omnipresent he was.

And then he said, the Lord thy God is a jealous God. Oprah says she was caught up in the rapture of that moment with everyone else until he said those words.

The Lord thy God is a jealous God. And then she says, quote, something didn't feel right in my spirit because I believe God is love and is in all things.

[1:23] That's when the search for something more than doctrine started to stir within me. End quote. Well, what do we say? Well, we say, first of all, that Oprah's minister had it right.

Didn't he? At least on that score. The Lord thy God is a jealous God. And that's not just her minister's opinion. That's God's own word, isn't it?

Turn with me to Exodus chapter 20. Because very early on in the Bible and then very often again, God himself tells us that he is a jealous God.

So if you would worship the one and true God, we must come to the Bible and let God tell us what he is like rather than listening and feeling to our spirit as to what we feel is right or isn't right.

We're studying Knowing God by J.I. We come to chapter 17 entitled The Jealous God. And here in Exodus 20, we are at Mount Sinai.

[2:27] And God spoke these words in a loud voice from the mountain covered with fire and cloud of smoke and deep darkness.

And he later wrote these words with his very own finger in tablets of stone. Verses 1 to 6. And the Lord God and the Lord's excuse me. And God spoke all these words.

I am the Lord, your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on earth beneath or in the waters below.

You shall not bow down to them or worship them for I, the Lord, your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

Now, this is the only attribute of God that is explicitly mentioned by God in the Ten Commandments. Now, he refers to creation in the Ten Commandments and the fourth commandment.

[3:42] He refers to having created all things in six days and rest. But as far as giving himself a title or listing an attribute, this is the only attribute that he explicitly states about himself in the Ten Commandments, that he is jealous.

And I think that emphasizes something of the importance of this attribute of God. And we'll find that though this is the first time that God revealed himself to Israel as being the jealous God, it's by it's far from being the last time.

It's something that he tells them more than once over and over. In fact, it wasn't long before he not only had to tell them, but had to show them just how jealous he was.

Now, as we begin, I want to hear from you. Why do you think Oprah and others, ourselves included, might have trouble thinking of God as a jealous God?

Why the reaction on her part or anyone else? All right, let's start with Roger. I think immediately think of what jealousy is about human beings.

[4:50] And if God had to show her with you, it's not going to look very good. Okay. So immediately we might think of jealousy as we have with each other.

Someone else. Mark. Jealousy makes us think of being selfish. Okay, of being selfish. Yes, Mike. She's a misunderstanding whether it is my goal.

Okay. In what way do you mean that? Well, I don't know if it is what she wrote. Oh. She could be jealous because she does love. And that's just the reason that she wants.

Okay, good. Good. We'll return to that. All right. So I think what we've seen is right. We think of jealousy in terms of human jealousy.

And so we see the sinfulness of jealousy as our jealousy often is. And we react against it. So there's a young lady and she's physically beautiful.

[5:55] And other girls are jealous of her. Or there's a young man who's good at sports. And the guys are jealous of him. And there's a man that's good at work. And so he gets promotion after promotion.

And everybody looks at him with a jaundiced eye. In fact, there's almost nothing that has not been the object of sinful jealousy.

Others with a nice house, a nice spouse, a good family, good grades, good health, finances. What is jealousy?

What does it look like? What does it feel like? What does jealousy say? Well, it says, I want what you've got. But it doesn't end there.

It says, I hate you because you have it and I don't. So jealousy is not only the obsessive desire to have what someone else has. But it's a hatred and ill will, a resentment towards others because they have it and we don't.

[7:01] It's the opposite of rejoicing with those who rejoice. And so it includes a desire to inflict pain on them or to see them suffer.

And so they never have a good word for the person they're jealous of. They're ever found cutting them down. And often in front of others. If somebody else praises the object of their jealousy, they'll be very quick to put in a word that will in some way diminish the praise that is being given to them. In fact, you can mark it down that where you find an overly critical person, there is almost always a jealous heart underneath.

So Joseph's brothers were jealous of him. Not just because they wanted a coat like he had. And not just because they wanted the favor of their father like he had.

But they didn't like the fact that he had it. And they didn't. And so they not only desired what he had, but they wanted to inflict pain on him. So what did they do? They were ready to murder him and ended up selling him into slavery.

[8:16] Or we think of the religious leaders in the book of Acts who were jealous of the apostles because everybody was following the apostles and not them. And so they're ready to beat them and threaten them and even ready to kill them.

Jealousy expresses itself then in malice and in meanness and even murder. Remember, it was for jealousy that the first murder took place. Cain was jealous of his brother Abel.

Jealous of the favor of God that he enjoyed with his offering, but that he did not receive. And so he put him to death. Wrath is cruel.

Anger is overwhelming. But who can stand before jealousy? So that's the kind of jealousy we live with. It grows out of our selfishness, out of our mistrust and resentment of others, out of our hatred and spite, our pride.

And we see that it's something ugly, something destructive, something repulsive. Shakespeare calls it the green-eyed monster. And we just can't, for our lives, figure out how God could be a jealous God.

[9:29] Well, in the same way that we've been learning that God's wrath and anger is not like our wrath and anger, so it's true of jealousy.

That God's jealousy is not like man's jealousy. It has none of the sinful elements that jealousy does have in man. But just as anger can have both a sinful expression and a righteous expression, there can be righteous anger and sinful anger, so it is with jealousy, even for men, even for mankind.

There is a bad jealousy, a sinful jealousy, but there is also a righteous jealousy. The Apostle Paul says in 2 Corinthians 11, 2, I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy.

So God has a jealousy, as we're going to see, we'll see more of that, and I have a jealousy over you that is godlike. It's a godly jealousy. He's the father, the spiritual father of these people, and he had promised them as his daughter to Christ, to be Christ's wife, and he is now very jealous to present her to the Lord Jesus as pure and upright.

So there's a righteous jealousy that is an essential ingredient of true love. As Mike was pointing out, Oprah doesn't understand what love is. Righteous jealousy is an attribute of love.

[11:09] It's an expression of love. Wives, if another woman started moving in on your man and flirting with your husband, would you be jealous?

I won't ask for a show of hands. If you saw him enjoying her flirtations and returning the same, would you be upset?

Well, I hope so. I hope so. If not, we would have to question your love for your husband. Because true love is always jealous over its loved one in marriage.

The very essence of marital love is its exclusiveness. We covenant before God to give ourselves all that we are to each other and to none else.

To keep ourselves entirely for the other. So when another intrudes into this marital love, the proper holy response is jealousy.

[12:15] There's a zero tolerance for any competing affection. She wants his heart all to herself. She wants his eyes all to herself. She wants his body.

She wants his desires all to herself. And rightly so. That is what marriage is. And that's what they've covenanted. She's rightly grieved when she has a rival for his heart.

Now, the root idea behind the Old Testament word for jealousy is to become intensely red. Does that make sense?

It carries the idea of becoming intensely red. When do you become intensely red in the face? When does the color of your face? When your emotions get stirred up.

Perhaps some of you show that more than others. But being zealously affected by something often turns us red. And that's something of the idea behind this word.

[13:19] And both in the Old Testament and the New Testament, words for jealousy are often found translated by zeal. Now, jealousy and zealously rhyme.

Jealous, zealous. But they're also synonyms. And they often are interchanged in the scriptures. So being jealous is being very zealous and very eager and stirred up and passionate about something that is counted precious.

It's a zeal to preserve and protect something very precious like the marriage relationship. Or a zeal to avenge it when it's been broken. Proverbs 6 says, Jealousy arouses a husband's fury.

And that's one more reason why you should leave the adulterous woman alone. Now, God's jealousy means he's very zealous then. He's very zealous about protecting what is precious to him. So we need to ask the question, what is precious to God? And we want to see two things this morning. He's very jealous and zealous about two things. First of all, his own name.

[14:26] His own glory. Look at Ezekiel 39 and verse 25. This is just one of perhaps dozens of texts that we could turn to.

This is a theme throughout the Bible that God is very zealous, jealous for his own glory. Ezekiel 39 verse 25.

Therefore, this is what the Sovereign Lord says. I will now bring Jacob back from captivity and will have compassion on all the people of Israel and I will be zealous for my holy name.

I will be zealous for my holy name. I will be jealous for my holy name. You see, God himself is infinitely glorious.

His name is praiseworthy and therefore he cannot be anything but passionately committed to maintaining his own honor. He zealously desires the exclusive devotion and worship of all his moral creatures.

[15:35] He'd be less than God if he didn't. So in Isaiah 42, 8, he says, I am the Lord. That is my name. I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols.

Why are idols so grievous to God? Well, first of all, because they steal something of his own glory. He's very jealous of his own glory, his praise, his honor.

Now, I think this is another reason people have trouble with God's jealousy. They have a hard time swallowing the fact that God is a God-centered being himself. that God has as his chief end for existing and for everything he does to pursue his own glory.

And people hear that and they say, I don't want a God like that. Well, the revelation of this jealousy is attached to which commandment?

We saw it there in Exodus 20. Which commandment is it attached to? The second. No idols. And again, the first reason for his statement of being jealous is because worshiping idols gives his glory to another and he's most zealous for that honor and glory.

[16:58] So most references in the Bible have some connection to idolatry. No idols, he says, For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God. So Moses receives those ten words from God.

God writes them on the tablets in his own finger and Moses stays on the mountain for 40 days.

Now, what are the Israelites doing down below? They're making what?

An idol. All right. So they're making an idol. And now comes the question, what will God do?

Did he really mean he's a jealous God? Does he really care that much about his people prostituting themselves with an idol? Well, you read on into chapter 32 of Exodus.

We find that his anger is burning and he's ready to wipe them off the face of the earth and to start all over by giving to Moses a seed from which he would raise up descendants to go into the promised land.

[18:03] And Moses intercedes with the Lord and the Lord relents of what he had threatened. And so with the people running wild around their idol, Moses comes down and stands at the entrance of the tent.

He sees the scene. He throws down the tablets and they break to pieces, I believe symbolizing that the whole law of God had just been shattered by their idolatry. They had broken God's law.

He breaks the tablets. And he says, Whoever is for the Lord, come to me. Chapter 32 and verse 27. And all the Levites rallied to him. All the sons of Levi come around Moses.

Verse 27. Exodus 32. This is what the Lord says. Each man strap a sword to his side, go back and forth through the camp from one end to the other, each killing his brother, friend and neighbor.

And so they did. And 3000 Israelites were killed. Levites were honored for their zeal. You know, that's why the Levites were given a position of honor in the temple worship because of that incident.

[19:03] They were very zealous for the Lord's honor. And then the Lord struck his people with a plague as well. So the sword and then the plague.

So when Israel married God at Mount Sinai, they soon found out that they were married to a very jealous husband.

Moses gets two new tablets. He's ready to go up the mountain to meet with God. And he says, Oh God, show me your glory. And he takes the tablets and goes back up the mountain.

And we saw last week or the week before, it wasn't it, from Exodus 34, that the Lord passed in front of Moses and revealed his glory.

He revealed his name to Moses. The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love, forgiving, wickedness, rebellion and sin.

[20:17] Yet, he does not leave the guilty unpunished. He punishes the sins of the children and their children for the sins of the father to the third and fourth generation.

So, that's the revelation of God's name and his glory. But he doesn't end there. Go on down to verse 12, chapter 34, and he's telling them, when you come into the promised land and I drive out the nations before you and enlist the nations.

Verse 12, be careful not to make a treaty with those who live in the land where you're going or they will be a snare among you. Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones and cut down their asherah poles.

These are idols. Do not worship any other God for the Lord whose name is jealous is a jealous God. So, here's the culmination of his self-revelation.

who I am, what I am. And the very culmination of it is, the Lord whose name is jealous is a jealous God. So, it's repeated for emphasis.

[21:19] It's punctuated by a sword and a plague. It shows that he doesn't take lightly a third party in his marriage relationship. And notice, it's his name.

The Lord whose name is jealous. This is his character. It's not a mood he gets into like with us. No, it's his name. It's what he is. He's always jealous.

He would not be God if he wasn't jealous. It's the essence of God, the name of God. Now, God's jealousy means he's very jealous then and zealous about protecting what's precious to him, his own glory, his name.

and idols share that glory with another. But secondly, he's very jealous about what's precious to him, namely his people. Now, isn't that precious?

To know that God holds precious his name and his people and he joins them together and he will be no more zealous and jealous for his name than he is for his people.

[22 : 25] They're his bride, his wife, whom he's taken to himself. I am your husband, he says in Isaiah 54, 5.

In the New Testament we see that we're married to Christ. We're called to be his faithful bride. And so this idea of a husband's jealousy is not stretching things at all when we speak of the jealousy of God.

It's an aspect of his covenant love for his own people. And no man with moral fiber in his being wants to share his wife with another man and neither does God.

He's a true and faithful husband to us and he expects us to be exclusively devoted to him. Calvin says the pure, the purer and chaster a husband is the more grievously he is offended when he sees his wife inclining to a rival.

So the Lord who is the purest and most chaste of all husbands burns with the hottest jealousy whenever we turn aside to other lovers instead of him and especially when our worship of him is transferred to another or adulterated in some way.

[23 : 33] Didn't we see that in the book of Hosea? That idolatry is to God what adultery is to marriage. It's spiritual adultery. Would you know what the heart of God thinks about the idols that we have in our lives?

It's as if your wife went out and committed adultery. That's how he feels about it. Hosea showed us that throughout his book. And he's not alone.

The prophets were constantly banging that drum like a woman unfaithful to her husband. So you have been unfaithful to me, O house of Israel, declares the Lord. Jeremiah 3.20 Psalm 78.58 They angered him with their high places.

They aroused his jealousy with their idols. So it's often idols, you see, because it replaces God's place in our heart, in our affections.

Not only does it share his glory with another, but it takes the place in our hearts that he alone deserves. And where that happens, God's jealousy moves him to take stern action.

[24 : 46] we saw that in Hosea, didn't we? How he disciplined his bride, Israel, and took her into the desert and hedged up her way with thorns and taught her that he is their husband.

He's the one who showers them with goodness, not their idols. Well, the Lord does that because he's jealous. When our hearts go running after idols, his jealousy stirs him to discipline us.

And so he sends Israel away into captivity and puts her into the furnace of affliction. His jealousy does that. He wants to see her heart turn back to him.

But once she has learned from the woodshed and the furnace of affliction, he then turns his jealousy against their enemies, against Babylon, against the Assyrians who took them away and who were punishing them.

And so he now is stirred up in his jealousy for his people. And now his jealousy is what moves him to bring them back into the land of promise and to destroy Babylon who is holding them captive.

[25 : 56] And we find references to that in Zechariah 1 and Joel 2 and Ezekiel 39. He's burning with jealousy for Israel, not against her.

And he burns with jealousy against their enemies. He calls his destroying wrath upon the nations my jealous wrath.

How dare you touch the apple of my eye? How dare you take out your desire for land and women and prosperity by just coming in and destroying my bride?

And so he goes after them with jealous wrath. He's the jealous and avenging God Nahum 1 2. The fire of his jealousy is aroused against the nations. So this is the God who's jealous, you see.

He's jealous for the people that he's taken as his bride. He's jealous for their very best interest. His jealousy is zeal for our welfare.

[27:02] Well, what is in our best interest? Do you know what's in our best interest? Our best interest is to have no other God but God. Our best interest is to be wholly devoted, sold out, exclusively, completely taken up with our God.

Single-mindedly obsessed with him. And therefore he's very jealous to wean us from the world and all other idols of life to make himself to become our all in all so that we can truly say, whom have I in heaven but thee.

There is nothing on earth I desire besides thee. So those are the two things God is jealous of. His own glory, the good of his people. He's bound them together. Now, application.

I trust that it's clear. How do we apply the jealousy of God? If God is jealous and he wants us to know how jealousy is, how is that to affect our lives? The first thing is we're to keep ourselves from all idols.

Turn to 1 Corinthians 10. We saw it in the second commandment. It's part of the first revelation of the fact that he is jealous, is that he says no idols.

[28:14] But I want you to see that this is not just an Old Testament thing. It's part of the name of God. We should know that if it's part of his nature, his being, then God does not change.

So we would expect that if God is jealous, it's his name, that we'll find him still jealous in the New Testament. But some people just think that if I don't find it in my New Testament, then it doesn't have anything really to say with me.

Well, we don't have time to direct our thoughts to that error, but just so you can see for yourself that this is not just an Old Testament emphasis. 1 Corinthians 10 and verse 14, the apostle says, therefore, my dear friends, he's just taught lessons from Israel's history, therefore, my dear friends, you flee from idolatry.

And as he's talking about idolatry, what was the form of idolatry that the Corinthians were in danger of falling into? Well, it was eating food sacrificed to idols.

And so God starts to say, how can you eat foods that are sacrificed to demons behind the idols and eat the food that's sacrificed to me, to eat the bread that is consecrated to me?

[29:27] How can you partake of their food and my food, the table of the Lord's supper? And then in verse 21, you cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too.

You cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons. Are we trying to arouse the Lord's jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

Isn't that something? Are we trying to arouse the Lord's jealousy? Because when we give ourselves to any part of idolatry, we arouse his jealousy. The very last verse of the book of 1 John, chapter 5 and verse 21, the last verse says, Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.

And he's not only referring to physical objects of pagan worship, you don't find any of that mentioned anywhere in the book of 1 John. You have a lot of wrong ideas about God and other kinds of idols.

Things that Ezekiel calls idols of the heart. And so we're not to allow any idols of the heart to come between us and God. So, he still is the jealous God.

[30:37] He still demands exclusive loyalty and love from us. In fact, what's the greatest commandment? We'll see it this morning in the service. Is that we love the Lord our God with how much of our heart?

All of it. And all of your soul, and all of your mind, and all of your strength, your whole being, lock, stock, and barrel, the whole thing is to be his, loving him.

He's to have all of you. Now, what are some of the competing affections that challenge his only place in our life? love? Well, we can love our own life more than him.

And when we fail to acknowledge him before this wicked and adulterous generation, we fail to stand up for him and for his truth. We love our own life more than him.

We can love the world more than him. James 4, 4. You remember what James calls us if we're a friend of the world, adulteresses.

[31:42] You're out on a fling with another lover if you love the world and the things that are in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. That ought to make worldliness ugly and flirting with the world detestable.

We can love money more than God. We can love leisure. We can love entertainments and jobs and family. Jesus says, if you love family more than me, you're not worthy of me.

You see, these are competing lovers for the heart and God is jealous over his people and demands that we have a heart of full devotion to him.

when he sees the heart taken up with an alien affection, something that belongs to him is being siphoned off onto another, onto another thing, another person.

He feels what Hosea felt when Gomer left him for another. He's the divine lover of his people. So think of that the next time you feel the tug of the world and the tug of something else to take his place in your life.

[32:55] The dearest idol I have known, whatever that idol be, help me to tear it from thy throne and worship only thee, Calper said. So Oprah, she rejects the idea of a jealous God by saying she believes that God is love.

And we would say, Oprah, you don't understand just how loving he is. He is so loving that he's jealous in his love. He loves us with a love that will not let us go, that will come after us and anything else coming between us to bring us back to himself.

That's the kind of love he has for his own. That's not less, that's more. So yes, jealousy in God is a beautiful thing, isn't it?

Isn't it wonderful to think, wives, that your husband would be jealous of you if you started drifting off with another? Isn't that a good feeling in your heart? I feel good knowing that's true of my wife toward me.

Isn't it a wonderful thing as a Christian to know that our God is jealous of us? He loves us with a love that will not let us go. So that's the first application. Flee all idols.

[34:06] Don't go near to them. The second, be zealous for God. Remember we saw jealousy and zealous go hand in hand.

Our right response to God's love for us is to love him in return. Our right response to God's jealousy for us is for us to be zealous for him. To be absolutely dedicated to living for his honor.

If his name deserves praise and worship and honor, then I ought to be completely sold out to that, to seeing him glorified. Zealously committed to doing his will.

The primary goal of my life should be to show the world that my God is the one and true living God and that he alone makes life meaningful and worthwhile. How do you do that?

Well, there's different ways according to our callings. You know how Elijah did it on Mount Carmel.

The people of Israel started worshiping Baal along with God. What's that?

[35:08] That's another lover. That's a third wheel in the marriage between God and Israel. And Elijah was very zealous for the Lord, wasn't he, on Mount Zion.

Or on Mount Carmel. Indeed, that's what he says afterwards in 1 Kings 19. 14. I have been very zealous for the Lord, God of hosts.

The King James has it, I've been very jealous for the Lord, God of hosts. Those are just synonyms. We live in a world that says money and possessions is God.

Well, we ought to live in such a way as to show that that's not true. God. God is God and he's the one who made us and that we are to live for.

Are we willing to adopt a simple lifestyle and to use our resources for his glory rather than for our own comforts and pleasures to demonstrate to this world? God is God.

[36:05] He's enough. Phineas was zealous for the Lord. You remember what he did with his spear through the idolater and adulterer in the camp. The apostle Paul was zealous for the Lord.

The Lord Jesus went into the temple and you remember the tables that flew and the animals that were sent scurrying. And remember what the disciples said when they saw it?

They later remembered what was written. The zeal of your house has consumed me. It has eaten me up. The Lord Jesus was consumed with zeal.

He was very zealous, very jealous for the honor of his father and for the salvation of his people.

What brings a rebuke to the Laodicean church?

They don't have zeal. They're neither hot nor cold. God says he's ready to vomit them. Jesus says I'm ready to vomit you out of my mouth. Be zealous therefore and repent, he tells them, Revelation 3.

[37:08] the Corinthian church was commended for their zeal. 2 Corinthians 7. 11. Titus says God redeemed us. Christ redeemed us that he might have a people who are his very own zealous for good works.

So Packer concludes his chapter by reading a section from J.C. Ryle on what it means to be zealous and I could do no better than to do the same.

Zeal in religion is a burning desire to please God, to do his will, to advance his glory in the world in every possible way. It's a desire which no man feels by nature, which the spirit puts in the heart of every believer when he's converted, but which some believers feel so much more strongly than others that they alone deserve to be called zealous.

A zealous man in religion is preeminently a man of one thing. It's not enough to say that he's earnest, hardy, uncompromising, thoroughgoing, wholehearted, fervent in spirit.

He only sees one thing. He only cares for one thing. He lives for that one thing. He's swallowed up in one thing. And that one thing is to please God. Whether he lives, whether he dies, whether he has health or whether he has sickness, whether he is rich or whether he's poor, whether he pleases man or whether he gives offense, whether he's thought wise or whether he's thought foolish, whether he gets blame or whether he gets praise, whether he gets honor or whether he gets shame.

[38 : 36] For all this, the zealous man cares nothing at all. He burns for one thing, and that one thing is to please God and to advance God's glory. If he's consumed in the very burning, he cares not for it.

He's content. He feels that like a lamp he's made to burn, and if consumed and burning, he has but done the work for which God appointed him. Such a one will always find a sphere for his zeal.

If he cannot preach, work, and give money, he will cry, and sigh, and pray. If he cannot fight in the valley with Joshua, he'll do the work of Moses, Aaron, and Hur on the hill.

If he's cut off from working himself, he'll give the Lord no rest till help is raised up from another quarter and the work is done. That's what I mean when I speak of zeal in religion.

Well, our God is a jealous, zealous God. Let's not let our hearts be inclined to any idols, but zealously pursue his glory.

[39 : 38] Word is dismissed.