

God is... Holy

God is ... #8 – Pastor Gary Combs – July 14, 2024 – Psalm 99

INTRO: Good morning church! Today, we're finishing our 8-week sermon series entitled "God is.... In this series we've been exploring the attributes and character traits of God. This is a worthy pursuit as John says...

Series theme verse: John 17:3 (ESV) And this is eternal life, that they **know you**, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

So knowing God, not just knowing about Him, but really knowing Him, is the key to life!

In this series so far, we've considered God's love, might, mercy, fatherhood, His unchanging nature, His faithfulness, and His goodness. Today, we want to consider God's holiness in a message entitled, "**God is... Holy.**"

Need: Why is it important for us to consider God's holiness? Indeed, the word "holy" might be taken negatively by some. If someone calls you a "Holy Joe," or refers to you as "holier than thou," you might take it to mean that they think you are judgmental, that you think you're better than them or that you're really a hypocrite. So, we have a little trouble with the word "holy."

Yet, God says to His people, "**Be holy, for I am holy**" (Lev. 11:44; 1 Pet. 1:16).

But before we try to understand what it might mean for us to be holy, we first need to get a grasp on what it means that "God is... Holy."

Puritan preacher, Thomas Watson, said of God being holy, "Holiness is the most sparkling jewel of his crown; it is the name by which God is known." R. L. Dabney wrote, "Holiness is to be regarded not as a distinct attribute but as the result of all God's moral perfection together." In other words, it describes how supreme, how high and altogether separate and apart the Creator is above all creation.

Trans: So how important is it for us to understand and respond to God's holiness? Consider this. When the Bible wants to emphasize something or intensify something, in the Hebrew, it will repeat the word twice. For instance when God said to Adam, "If you eat of the tree of the knowledge, you shall **surely die**" (Gen. 2:17). Except in the Hebrew it doesn't say, "surely" die. It says, "die die." In the NT, we see this in the way Jesus often began a saying with, "Truly, truly" ("Amen, amen"), to intensify its meaning. Yet the only place in the Bible where I can think of something being triple-repeated is as it regards God's holiness. Both Isaiah in the OT and John in the NT had a vision of the heavenly host saying, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty" (Isa. 6:3; Rev. 4:8). As pastor Ray Pritchard has said, "The Bible never says that God is love, love, love or mercy, mercy, mercy, or justice, justice, justice. But it does say that he is holy, holy, holy."

BODY: In Psalm 99, the Psalmist called worshipers to praise God for His holiness. We can praise God for His holiness. How can we praise God for His holiness. The text gives **three ways** we can praise God for His holiness.

TEXT: Psalm 99 (ESV) ¹ The LORD reigns; let the peoples tremble! He sits enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth quake! ² The LORD is great in Zion; he is exalted over all the peoples. ³ Let them praise your great and awesome name! Holy is he! ⁴ The King in his might loves justice. You have established equity; you have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob. ⁵ Exalt the LORD our God; worship at his footstool! Holy is he! ⁶ Moses and Aaron were among his priests, Samuel also was among those who called upon his name. They called to the LORD, and he answered them. ⁷ In the pillar of the cloud he spoke to them; they kept his testimonies and the statute that he gave them. ⁸ O LORD our God, you answered them; you were a forgiving God to them, but an avenger of their wrongdoings. ⁹ Exalt the LORD our God, and worship at his holy mountain; for the LORD our God is holy!

WE CAN PRAISE GOD FOR HIS HOLINESS...

1. By recognizing His great majesty.

EXP: (1-3) The Psalmist's call to worship begins by describing God as a high and holy king. The psalm is divided into three stanzas (1-3,4-5, 6-9). All three begin by explaining why God is holy and conclude with a call to praise Him for His holiness (see v.3, 5, and 9). So, vv1-2 give a cause for praise and v3 gives a call to praise. Recognizing God's great majesty, His holiness, we also see ourselves.

"**LORD**" (1,2,5,6,8,9 - 7x) (יהוה, *Yehōvâ*) - Lit., "I AM." The covenantal name of God first revealed to Moses (Ex. 3:14). "Yahweh" or "Jehovah." The self-existent One.

"**Reigns**" (1) (מָלַךְ, *mālak*) - to be or become king or queen, reign

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“Tremble” (1) (רָגַז, *rāgāz*) - tremble, quake, rage, quiver, be agitated, be excited, be perturbed

“Enthroned” (1) (יָשַׁב, *yāšab*) - Lit., “to sit.” This refers to the mercy seat, which was the Ark of the Covenant, in the Tabernacle. “Upon” better translated “above” or “between” the cherubim.



“Quake” (1) (נָוֵט, *nūṭ*) - to quake, shake, dangle, to be moved. Even creation should shake!

“Great” (2,3 - 2x) (גָּדוֹל, *gāḏōl*) - great; large (in magnitude and extent).

“Exalted” (2,5,9 - 3x) (רָמוּ, *rūm*) - to rise, rise up, be high, be lofty, be exalted

“Praise” (3) (יָדָה, *yādā*) - to give thanks, laud, praise, to confess, confess (the name of God)

“Awesome” (3) (יָרָע, *yārē*) - to fear, revere, be afraid, to stand in awe of, be awed, terrible.

“Holy” (3,5,9 - 3x) (קָדוֹשׁ, *qāḏōš*) - sacred, holy, separate, set apart. “God’s holiness is what separates Him from all other beings, what makes Him separate and distinct from everything else. God’s holiness is more than just His perfection or sinless purity; it is the essence of His “other-ness,” His transcendence. God’s holiness embodies the mystery of His awesomeness and causes us to gaze in wonder at Him as we begin to comprehend just a little of His majesty.” — <https://www.gotquestions.org/holy-holy-holy.html>

ARG: After God brought Moses and the Israelites safely across the Red Sea, they sang this song:

Exodus 15:11 (ESV) “Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?”

Saying that God is holy is saying that God is in a category to Himself. There is none other like Him.

1 Samuel 2:2 (ESV) “There is none holy like the Lord: for there is none besides you; there is no rock like our God.”

ILL: Consider the prophet Isaiah’s response to seeing a vision of God on His heavenly throne.

Isaiah 6:1-5 (ESV) ¹ In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. ² Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. ³ And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!” ⁴ And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. ⁵ And I said: “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!”

APP: Isaiah beheld God’s great and majestic holiness. And recognized the Lord, he saw himself, crying out in confession: “Woe is me! For I am lost” (KJV “I am undone.”). In order to praise God for His holiness, we must confess our lostness apart from Him. He is God and I am not! When we compare ourselves to each other, we may be tempted to think that we’re doing pretty good. But when we see ourselves in the light of God’s majestic holiness, we tremble and cry out saying, “Woe is me!” For we say, “Holy is He!”

2. By understanding His moral perfection.

EXP: (4-5) Notice the words “justice” and “righteousness” (4). God’s holiness speaks, as we have already said, primarily of His “otherness,” the fact that He is distinctly different and separate, transcendent from us. But secondarily, it speaks of His moral perfection, His justice and righteousness are attributes of His holiness.

“King” (4) (מֶלֶךְ, *melek*) - a king:—king, royal.

“Justice” (4) (מִשְׁפָּט, *mišpāṭ*) - judgment, justice. God is not only just. He “loves” justice! Lit., “The might of the King loves justice.” He loves justice with all His might.

“Equity” (4) (מִישָׁר, *mēšār*) - evenness, uprightness, straightness, equity, level, smoothness

“Worship” (5) (שָׁחָה, *šāḥā*) - to bow down, prostrate oneself, before superior in homage,

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ARG: God's law is a revelation of His holiness and moral perfection. ("The Holy Bible")

Romans 7:12 (ESV) So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.

Jesus applied God's law to our motives and attitudes in the Sermon on the Mount, using the word "perfect" in place of the word "holy" as found in Leviticus 11:44. Who can do this? Only God!

Matthew 5:48 (ESV) You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

ILL: The book of James says that God's Word is like a "mirror" (James 1:23). Looking there we see our sin.

APP: Comparing ourselves to God's great majesty, we say with Isaiah, "Woe is me. For I am undone." And seeing ourselves in light of God's moral perfection, we say with Isaiah, "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!" (Isa. 6:5). We praise the Lord saying, "Holy is He!"

3. By calling on His revealed forgiveness.

EXP: (6-9) We're in the final stanza. Notice the Lord "answered" and was "forgiving." He provided intercessors to bridge the gap between a holy God and sinful humanity and a way of forgiveness.

"Moses/Aaron/Samuel...priests" (6) - "The final stanza begins by singling out three noted intercessors for the nation of Israel. The term "priest" here is used loosely for one who entreats the Lord on behalf of his people" (Daniel J. Estes, *NAC #13*, p.238). God gave the law through Moses. He gave the word to anoint David through Samuel. And David is the line through which God's forgiveness was revealed in Jesus.

"Called" (6) (קָרָא, *qārā'*) - to call, cry, utter a loud sound; to call unto, cry (for help), call (with name of God)

"Answered" (6, 8 - 2x) (עָנָה, *ānā'*) - to answer, respond, testify, speak, shout

"They kept" (7) (שָׁמַר, *šāmar*) - to keep, guard, keep watch and ward, protect, save life; watch, watchman

"Testimonies" (7) (עֲדָה, *ēdā'*) - testimony, witness, always plural and always of laws as divine testimonies

"Statute" (7) (חֻק, *ḥōq*) - statute, ordinance, limit, something prescribed, due, prescribed task or portion

"Forgiving" (8) (נָשָׂא, *nāšā'*) - to lift up, to take away, carry off, forgive

"Avenger" (8) (נָקַם, *nāqam*) - to avenge, take vengeance, be punished

"Wrongdoings" (8) (נַעֲמָדִים, *nāqam*) - evil deeds, wrongdoings, evil works.

ARG: Jesus is our great high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners and exalted...

Hebrews 7:22-27 (ESV) ²² This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant. ²³ The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, ²⁴ but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. ²⁵ Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. ²⁶ For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. ²⁷ He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself.

Only faith in Jesus will cleanse us of sin and make us holy ("sanctified").

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 (NLT) ⁹ Don't you realize that those who do wrong will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Don't fool yourselves. Those who indulge in sexual sin, or who worship idols, or commit adultery, or are male prostitutes, or practice homosexuality, ¹⁰ or are thieves, or greedy people, or drunkards, or are abusive, or cheat people—none of these will inherit the Kingdom of God. ¹¹ Some of you were once like that. But you were cleansed; you were made holy; you were made right with God by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

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ILL: In the book of Haggai, the Lord brought to his attention some facts about being holy...

Haggai 2:11-13 (ESV) ¹¹ “Thus says the Lord of hosts: Ask the priests about the law: ¹² ‘If someone carries holy meat in the fold of his garment and touches with his fold bread or stew or wine or oil or any kind of food, does it become holy?’” The priests answered and said, “No.” ¹³ Then Haggai said, “If someone who is unclean by contact with a dead body touches any of these, does it become unclean?” The priests answered and said, “It does become unclean.”

This reveals the fact that holiness cannot be imputed without coming into direct contact with the holy. There is no secondary transference of holiness. One must come into contact with the holy in order to be sanctified, to be made holy. But sin... sin is easily transferred. The holy sacrifice of meat made the robe holy, but the robe could not transfer holiness to another.

Remember the stories about unclean people coming into contact with the holy Jesus? Like the woman who was ceremonially unclean for 12 years because of a discharge of blood:

Matthew 9:20-22 (ESV) ²⁰ And behold, a woman who had suffered from a discharge of blood for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment, ²¹ for she said to herself, “If I only touch his garment, I will be made well.” ²² Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, “Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well.” And instantly the woman was made well.

Or the unclean leper that Jesus touched and healed:

Matthew 8:1-3 (NLT) ¹ Large crowds followed Jesus as he came down the mountainside. ² Suddenly, a man with leprosy approached him and knelt before him. “Lord,” the man said, “if you are willing, you can heal me and make me clean.” ³ Jesus reached out and touched him. “I am willing,” he said. “Be healed!” And instantly the leprosy disappeared.

APP: Recognizing God’s great majestic holiness, and understanding His holy moral perfection, leads us to call out to Him in confession and repentance, asking for Him to save us. His answer? Jesus, the Holy One. As Peter said,

John 6:68-69 (ESV) ⁶⁸ Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, ⁶⁹ and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.”

“If you think you can walk in holiness without keeping up perpetual fellowship with Christ, you have made a great mistake. If you would be holy, you must live close to Jesus.” — Charles Spurgeon

CONCLUSION: The prophet Isaiah was overcome with woe and feelings of sinfulness when he saw a vision of the holy God. But when he confessed his sin the Scripture says:

Isaiah 6:6-8 (NKJV) ⁶ Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. ⁷ And he touched my mouth with it, and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; Your iniquity is taken away, And your sin purged.” ⁸ Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: “Whom shall I send, And who will go for Us?” Then I said, “Here am I! Send me.”

We can say with the psalmist: “We exalt the Lord our God and worship Him. For the Lord our God is holy!” Recognizing God’s majestic and morally perfect holiness causes us to actually see ourselves and our need for the Holy One of God to come to us, to touch us, and to make us holy for His sake.

Let’s pray.