

# The Holiness of God - Part 1

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[ 0 : 00 ] It is good to be with you this morning.

I have spent some weeks now, and my plans are to spend the rest of my life, looking at the doctrine of the holiness of God. And when you decide to study the holiness of God, and to bring messages on the holiness of God, you discover a few things. One thing I discovered is you're on holy ground. And I couldn't help but think continually almost about Nadab and Abihu in the Old Testament, who offered strange fire to the holiness of God and were consumed. So far, I'm still here. We'll see. But I have at this point, in my private study and private meditations, arrived at two foundational truths concerning this topic. One, God is holy. Two, I am not. So I've gotten those two truths down pat.

I think there will be others as I go through this in the next, as I say, the rest of my life. Now, why have I engaged in this particular study? Because quite frankly, it can be rather exhausting. And for whatever reason, the Lord kept waking me up at two in the morning and four in the morning, and I would go look things up. Typically, I would pick a book of the Bible or a portion of the book of the Bible, and we would talk about that. But I actually came to this study for a couple of reasons.

[ 2 : 31 ] First, and these are not in any particular order of importance, they're all important. We find ourselves, as Christians, surrounded in our day by a profane, godless culture with collapsing morals.

It's true in our country, and it's true around the world. Much of the church in the West, and by that, I mean Western Europe, all of Britain, Canada, and much of America have walked away from the true god of the word and embraced false gods of their imagination.

The true god, which our fathers and our grandfathers, our grandparents, worshipped, has been significantly replaced by a false god that is designed to make men and women comfortable. This false god, which does not exist, by the way, except in the imagination, or perhaps in the extreme, in some type of demon form, is for a lot of people in our day, nothing more than a genie. You see this often on the more extreme telemarketers or televangelists on television, and he's like a genie, and if you rub his lamp, and I wrote down, rob, maybe that's a good word, but if you rub his lamp a certain way, you'll get what you want.

[ 4 : 28 ] Now, how did this happen? It happened because around our land, and in these other nations I mentioned, theology, which is the proper study of God, has disappeared.

It's largely gone away. This essential study has disappeared from individuals, from churches, and even entire denominations.

And because theology is no longer important, many do not understand God's nature, God's purpose, and God's will.

This really came home to me several months ago when a very close personal friend of mine who is a true minister of the gospel of Christ was visiting with the associate pastor of one of the largest liberal churches in our region, a church of around a thousand people.

My minister friend could tell that the visitor was quite shallow when it came to Bible truth in spite of the fact that he held a bachelor's, master's, and doctorate from the liberal seminary of his particular denomination.

[ 6 : 10 ] So my friend, the minister, the true minister of Christ, steered the conversation to the atonement, the atonement. He started asking him about the atonement of Christ.

That's the cross. How important is the cross to Christians? And the man looked rather puzzled for a moment, and he said to my friend, I've never heard that word before.

I've never heard the word atonement. This individual and the church that he ministers at did not understand and did not receive teaching on the atonement.

The atonement is how we are saved. It's the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. And neither would I suspect would they have understood or embraced any teaching on the holiness of God.

The great English poet, Kipling, was a prolific writer of books, short stories, and poems. If you stayed awake during English literature, and I didn't have to because there was a real smart girl sitting next to me, but if you stayed awake during English literature, you may associate him with the Jungle Book.

[ 7 : 54 ] He also wrote poems like Gunga Din and Mandalay. Kind of had a Indian, not a Native American, but from India, flavor. Well, he was born in India to British parents, grew up there.

He wrote another poem called The Way Through the Woods. And it begins like this. They shut the road through the woods 70 years ago.

Weather and rain have undone it again. And now you would never know there was once a road through the woods.

And I like poets like Robert Frost and Kipling about woods because I have woods on my farm. And when we get a dusting of snow and the ticks and chiggers have gone to sleep, I like to walk in those woods.

That poem, though, describes the topic of God's holiness in many churches today. teaching and preaching on the holiness of God has so disappeared from the church landscape in our generation, you would never know that it was once the central truth taught by teachers and preachers of the gospel of Christ.

[ 9 : 28 ] figuratively speaking, you would never know that there was a road called holiness that once ran through the church.

Now, when I say the holiness of God, what do I mean? A Reverend Luther Lee before the American Civil War mid-1800s said this, perfect, this is the holiness of God, perfect holiness in entire moral goodness to the exclusion of all moral evil.

God is absolutely holy because he possesses in his own nature all possible moral goodness to the exclusion of every kind and degree of moral evil.

A little more contemporary to our time, Dr. MacArthur said this, God does not conform to a holy standard. He is the standard.

He never does anything wrong. There are no degrees to his holiness. He is holy, flawless, without error, without sin, fully righteous, utterly, absolutely, infinitely holy.

[ 11 : 03 ] And Moses, writing inspired words in Exodus, said this, who is like you, O Lord, among the mighty ones? Your translation may say gods with a little g, that's Hebrew for mighty ones.

Who is you, who is like you, O Lord, among the mighty ones? Who is like you, glorious in holiness? That's a description of the God we worship today.

God is a person. But God is a person. And since God is a person, he can be known, and while we can never know him in fullness, not on earth, and maybe not even in heaven, we can know him to the extent he has revealed himself to us, and Christ came to reveal the Father to us.

to know the true God, you must be in a relationship with him through his son, our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We call that being saved. And when that happens, the very Spirit of God, the third person of the Holy Trinity, the Spirit of God takes up residence in us.

[ 12 : 21 ] The Scriptures are clear. He never leaves us nor forsakes us. Further, the Spirit reveals God to us through the written word, which we call the Holy Bible.

And Paul says to the natural man, and that is to say the unsaved man, words in the Bible are foolishness. They can only be spiritually understood without the Spirit of God.

The deep truths contained in the Holy Bible cannot be discerned. This is why the unsaved professor teaching Bible at the University of Chicago doesn't have a clue what he's talking about, but young men like these two and others, they can understand.

They can understand. Because the Spirit of God will reveal it to them, and I know in these boys' case, through their parents. I know that for a fact.

So what do we study to know God and to know him even better? What do we study? Well, a good place to start are the attributes of God, which, of course, begs the question, what is an attribute?

[ 13 : 37 ] An attribute is defined as a quality, character, or characteristic ascribed to someone or to something.

Now, when it comes to the true God, he has many attributes, more than we can ever mention today or probably even in a lifetime. Here's a very brief list.

Attributes such as love, mercy, sovereignty, immutability, omnipresence, omnipotence, omniscience, and those are only a few of his attributes.

attributes. But there is one of God's attributes that stands out among all the others. It sets God apart from all living creatures, from all humans, from all angels.

And to really get an appreciation for this particular attribute, I'm going to ask you to take a look at the sixth chapter of Isaiah.

[ 14 : 43 ] And while you're turning there, let me give you a little background information before I read the passage. Isaiah was a prophet of God. Some feel he was the greatest prophet in the long history of Israel.

He served under four kings. He served at a time of great moral decline. Many Israelites were turning their backs on God.

During the time Isaiah was a prophet, the northern kingdom, and remember, Israel was split in two, the northern kingdom was taken captive by invaders. The southern kingdom, Judah, was attacked by Assyria.

Now, Isaiah had a very important ministry during very difficult times. And during Isaiah's time of service, God raised up a king in Judah.

Compared to the other kings, he was a man of influence, he was a man of intelligence, and he was a man of some good, basic, just goodness.

[ 16 : 06 ] He was a good guy. His name was Uzziah. He reigned as king over Judah for a very long time, 52 years.

That's a long time. And many people in the nation in his day would have labeled him as a very successful king, and as a king who was very beneficial to the people of Judah.

Through the kingship, if you will, of Uzziah, he subdued the enemies of Judah, he ushered in a period of peace, he fortified Jerusalem to discourage any would-be invaders from even looking their way, and under Uzziah, the people felt very secure.

They probably felt more secure than we do this morning, given the fact that North Korea exploded a massive hydrogen bomb while we slept yesterday as a test.

Uzziah also was very innovative and developed agriculture and commerce and the nation prospered.

[ 17 : 38 ] But there was something very sad about the reign of Uzziah. Toward the end of his life, he looked around and he saw all that had been accomplished and he said to the nation, look what I have done.

Does anyone have a problem with that? Look what I have done. And we have a word for that, don't we? It's called pride.

Instead of giving credit to God where the credit always rightly belongs, Uzziah proudly boasted of his great accomplishments.

And God reacted to the proud Uzziah by giving him a terminal case of leprosy. And in spite of his failures, the people liked Uzziah because he brought peace and prosperity to the nation, even though the real credit belonged to the God of the Bible.

And when Uzziah died, panic set in among the people. The king who had done all this in their minds was dead.

[ 19 : 09 ] What would they do now? And Isaiah, the great prophet of God to the nation, was sad. he was very disturbed by the death of the earthly king, so he goes to the temple seeking comfort and a measure of peace.

And to say the least, his life would never be the same again. Again, let me read to you Isaiah chapter six, verse one.

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting up on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of his robe filled the temple.

That is an astonishing statement. That's astonishing. Isaiah enters the earthly temple, a house made by human hands, and somehow, and we don't know how, he is transported to the heavenly temple.

We're not told how that happened, but he immediately sees the Lord. And you may note in your Bible, if you've got a good translation, that the word Lord is spelled there, with a capital L followed

by lowercase letters.

[ 20 : 48 ] That is the word Adonai, and it has reference to God's sovereignty. In other words, Isaiah looks up and seated on the throne is the sovereign Lord, the sovereign God of the universe.

And in verse 3 and in verse 5, we will see the same word spelled Lord with all capital letters. That is the word Yahweh, the sacred name of God, a reference to God's essential nature.

And that sacred name is to be held in highest reference. So in the year that Judah lost its earthly king, Isaiah saw the real king.

There had to be comfort in knowing that God was still on the throne. The human king was dead, but God never depends on human kings, on monarchs, or on presidents.

Never. fear. And in the midst of great fear and turmoil over the loss of the earthly king, the eternal king makes an appearance.

[ 22 : 12 ] It reminds me of when Moses went away and he died. And Joshua reported that to the people and they were all in panic. And this is not King James' translation, this is my translation.

But God told Joshua, you know, Joshua, that's right. Moses is dead, but I'm still here. The king was still here.

He's a heavenly king, the Lord Jesus. And when my world and your world seems to be coming apart, it is comforting to know that the real king is on the throne.

And as I'm fond of saying, God's on the throne and he hasn't panicked. Unless he does, I'm not going to. If he does, I'm probably going to panic. But I don't think God is going to panic in the slightest.

I'm reminded of King David who wrote these words in Psalm 2. Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against his anointed saying, let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.

[ 23 : 34 ] Now, how does God react to that? He who sits in the heavens laughs. The Lord holds them in derision and then he will speak to them in his wrath and terrify them in his fury saying, as for me, I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill.

I will tell of the decree the Lord said to me, you are my son, today I have begotten you, ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage and the ends of the earth your possession.

You will break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. Now therefore, O kings, be wise, be warned, O rulers of the earth, serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling.

Kiss the son, and we know who the son is, don't we? Lest he be angry and you perish in the way, for his wrath is kindled quickly.

Blessed are all who take refuge in him. I hope you've taken refuge in Christ. And again, David says in Psalm 11, if the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?

[ 24 : 52 ] the Lord is in his holy temple, the Lord is on his throne. So when you wake up at three o'clock in the morning and the world seems like it's falling apart, it always seems worse at three in the morning than three in the afternoon.

But remember, at three in the morning, as you look up at that black ceiling, the Lord never slumbers, never sleeps, he's on his throne. So Isaiah sees the king on the throne.

God was exalted, he was high and lifted up, his robe filled the temple, and dare I say it was a big temple. And in case there's any confusion, exactly who Isaiah saw, the apostle John, centuries later wrote by the power, authority, and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that the person Isaiah saw on the throne was none other than Christ Jesus.

This was a pre-incarnate appearance of the Lord in what we call a Christophany. Listen to verse 2 of Isaiah 6.

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.

[ 26 : 30 ] What are seraphim? They are a unique order of angels. They were created by God to attend to his holiness.

holiness. It can be said that they are the guardians of the holiness of God. And we note in this verse that the seraphim have three sets of wings.

With one set of wings they fly, and let me say it is probably more accurate to say they had the ability to hover. They hovered over the throne of God.

One minister has called them a celestial helicopter. Their role was to hover around God who was high and lifted up. This was the use of the first set of wings. With the second set of wings, the seraphim covered their feet. Now over the years there has been a variety of explanations for this fact. Some have argued that covering their feet was an expression of humility.

[ 27 : 44 ] There may be a degree of truth to that, but it certainly is not the major reason. Back in the early writings of Moses, we find Moses on a dusty hilltop, don't we?

And there's no doubt that he'd been on that hill many times. Nothing amazing happened, nothing unique. He's just up there, tending to the flocks on a dusty hill. hilltop, but that particular day would be different. Moses looks over and he sees a burning bush, but it was not being consumed.

It was on fire in Moses' eyes, but it wasn't being consumed. And he drew closer because he wanted to figure out what is going on with this phenomena.

And he hears a voice come forth from the bush, commanding Moses, take off your shoes.

[ 28 : 48 ] You are standing on holy ground. I'm glad Moses just said, Lord, I've been here before. I don't know what you're talking about. No, this is holy ground he was standing on.

It had not been particularly holy ground on the other days Moses spent on the hill. So what made this day different?

What made this day different? It was holy because God was present on that day. Yahweh was in the burning bush.

Yahweh was the burning bush. and Moses realized he was in the presence of God and that sanctified everything around him.

Now I'm going to add something here. It's not even in my notes. It just popped in. You know, in Leviticus, once a year, the high priest entered the holy of holies.

[ 29 : 51 ] That was holy ground. Do you all know where the holy of holies is in our day? On earth? It's not in Israel.

It's in us. The Holy Spirit of God. We walk around with the holy of holies inside us.

Think about that. Especially if you ever flirt with sin. As I all too often do. It's a confession. My wife's not here.

Maybe she is. I don't know. Anyway, she'll get the tape. All scriptures tell us that this is holy ground because Yahweh is there.

They covered their feet because they're in God's presence. God makes everything near him holy and sanctified.

[ 30 : 53 ] God's And the scriptures go on to tell us that with the third set of wings, the seraphim covered their face. No created human and no created angel can gaze upon the full glory of God and live.

It can't happen. one day Moses asked God to show him his full glory and God gave him this response.

No one can see my glory and live. Those are inspired words. So God comes up with a solution for Moses.

He hid him in the cleft of the rock and he passed by and by doing so he put on display to Moses only his backside. I believe the angels in Isaiah's day covered their faces because they could not look upon the full glory of God and live.

Now to this point this has all been incredible but it's going to get even more so. Verse 3 talking about the seraphim and one called to another and said holy holy holy is the Lord of hosts the whole earth is full of his glory.

[ 32 : 32 ] It took me hours to look up what this is called musically and then I left it at home. I'm not going to embarrass you but this is a weak example.

Remember when we would sit around the campfire and sing row row row your boat? When the first seraphim got to the third holy the next one started and when he got to the third the first one started over and the next one and I don't know how many there were.

There may have been a dozen there may have been thousands. I don't know but they're declaring that God is thrice holy. seraphim fly or hover in the presence of God eternally declaring his holiness. And they used this very unique expression very unique. They declared that God is holy, holy, holy. Now why did they do that?

One person has humorously said so it conformed to the hymn of the same name. Well that was written a long time after Isaiah. A long time.

[ 33 : 44 ] I think it was written by a guy named Reginald Heber I think. And you're affirming, that's good. That came a couple thousand years after Isaiah's encounter in the temple.

Why do they make this declaration three times? Some have suggested it was recognition of the trinity. Holy is God the Father, holy is God the Son, holy is God the Spirit.

And I think there's a measure of truth in that. The trinity was certainly present, but I don't believe it was the primary reason for declaring God as thrice holy.

I do believe there is a more accurate answer. The Jewish writers, Old and New Testament, utilized a literary device known as repetition.

And if they wanted to really stress something, they repeated it. And we see this often in the Word of God. Remember, Jesus often started speaking using the words, verily, verily, or truly, truly.

[ 35 : 00 ] And I promise you that got everyone's attention. He's going beyond what is the norm. This is truly, truly. Repetition used here is the seraphim's way of emphasizing the holiness of God.

And we cannot fully grasp the fact that God is holy, much less that he is holy, holy, holy. And it's interesting that in all of God's Word, 66 books, this is the only attribute that is repeated three times. You will never read God is love, love, love. Is he? Yeah. But you won't read that. You will never read that God is mercy, mercy, mercy.

God is mighty, mighty, mighty. Only in holiness. Only in holiness. The Bible says God is holy, holy, holy.

Now as believers, we are called on to worship the Lord in his beauty. We are called upon to worship the Lord in his holiness.

[ 36 : 28 ] I want you to really be thinking about that this week, till we get back next week, Lord willing. If you are engaged in a worshiping life, you must affirm the absolute holiness of God.

Here we have a psalm, Psalm 96, dedicated to worship. I read last night on a Christian website where you can actually put this to music.

Oh, sing to the Lord a new song. Sing to the Lord all the earth. Sing to the Lord, bless his name, tell of his salvation from day to day, declare his glory among the nations.

How marvelous works among all, his marvelous works among all the peoples. For great is the Lord and greatly to be praised, he is to be feared above all gods.

For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols. Well, the psalmist shouldn't shade it, he ought to tell it like it is. Any god with a small g is a worthless idol.

[ 37 : 45 ] But the Lord made the heavens, splendor and majesty are before him, strength and beauty are his sanctuary. Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the Lord the glory and strength, ascribe to the Lord the glory, do his name, bring an offering, and come into his courts.

Now, listen to verse 9 of that psalm. Worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness, tremble before him all the earth.

When you encounter the holiness of God, whether that is in private or corporate worship, you are to do two things.

I guess this is the application. I didn't think of it that way. You are to worship his holiness and you are to tremble before his holiness.

Many churches in the 21st century have not worshipped before his holiness, nor trembled before his holiness.

[ 39 : 09 ] holiness. So what did Isaiah experience all the way back in Isaiah chapter 6? He looks up and he sees Yahweh seated on the throne.

His robe fills the temple. The seraphim are all around and they're declaring that God is thrice holy. And the next verse says this, and the foundations of the threshold shook at the voice of him who called and the house was filled with smoke.

That would get your attention. And it got Isaiah's attention. He's been called up as Paul was called up, as John was called up in the book of Revelation, as Stephen just before he was stoned to death, looked up and saw heaven open and saw Christ standing at the right hand of the Father. By the way, that's the position of the defense attorney, not the judge. That's the defense attorney, one of his own coming into heaven that he died for. We won't get into that.

But the foundations and the thresholds of the temple shook. This is the heavenly temple shaking. And then Isaiah says this, woe is me.

[ 40 : 42 ] This is the great prophet of Israel, their greatest human prophet. And he says, woe is me.

Now, what does that mean? What exactly did Isaiah mean when he pronounced judgment on himself?

He pronounced a woe on himself. He said, woe is me. What does that mean, Isaiah? Tell us. And he's going to next Sunday because this was part one.

And we're going to continue next time, and I hope you can be here. We'll continue next time and see what Isaiah meant.

He saw Yahweh on the throne and he said, woe. Thank you.