

God's Holiness - Part 1

by Richard Owen Roberts

Richard Owen Roberts explores the profound nature of God's holiness, emphasizing its implications for believers and the necessity of reverence in worship.

Duration: 25:05

Topics: "Character Of God"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher begins by referencing a passage from the book of Revelation, specifically chapter 4. He describes a vision of a throne surrounded by four beasts, each with different characteristics. These beasts continuously praise and worship God, declaring His holiness and eternal nature. The preacher then connects this vision to the 40th chapter of Isaiah, where Isaiah encounters the Lord and is cleansed of his sins. The sermon emphasizes God's position in the universe and the importance of recognizing His holiness and worshiping Him.

Transcript

At verse one of Isaiah six, in the year that King Uzziah died, I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His frame filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims, each one had six wings, with flame He covered His face, and with flame He covered His feet, and with flame He did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory.

And the post of the door moved, and the voice of Him that cried in the house was filled with smoke. Then said I, woe is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips. For mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.

Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar, and he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips, and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged. And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I, send me. And the passage is, the next passage is similar, found in the book of the Revelation at chapter four.

The book of the Revelation at chapter four. Starting at verse six. And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne were four beasts full of eyes before and behind.

And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle. The four beasts had each of them six wings about him, and they were full of eyes within, and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was and is and is to come. And when those beasts give glory and honor and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth forever and ever, the four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne and worshiped him that liveth forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power, for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created.

Holy, holy, holy. Now, this is the only attribute of God which is spoken of in this kind of language, this thrice-repeated affirmation. You do not read anywhere and all of Scripture, Eternal, eternal, eternal, or omniscient, omniscient, omniscient, or unchanging, unchanging, unchanging, or love, love, love, but holy, holy, holy.

Holiness in Scripture is affixed to the name of God more often than any other quality. He is described as the Holy One. He is spoken of as the Holy One of Israel.

He is declared to be the Holy One of Judah. It is said, Thou wilt not allow Thy Holy One to see corruption. It is stated, Whose name is holy.

And we are commanded, all of us, to bless His holy name. And God declares, I will set my faith against him who profanes my holy name. Now, the term holy, in reference to God, has two primary meanings.

The first one we normally think of and apply to God is that of moral perfection. When we think of God, we think of him as being absolutely pure, absolutely free of all sin and all stains, wholly perfect. Now, a text like Matthew 5, 48 deals with this aspect of holiness.

He is, therefore, perfect, even as your Father, which is in heaven, is perfect. Now, in God, there is not one single blemish, not even one tiny stain, not the least of any imperfection whatsoever. He is holy.

But there is another meaning to the term, perhaps more prominently used even than that of moral perfection, and that is separation. When God is described as holy, it is really meant that God is separate, apart, distinct, distant, removed. Now, we use the term sanctified.

Unfortunately, many people are confused concerning the use of this term, and don't rightly understand it. But I trust each of you is aware that a person who is sanctified is a person who is set apart, set apart from that which is common or ordinary to that which is special or extraordinary. The sanctified person is consecrated, set apart to be holy, to serve the living God, who is himself also set apart and holy.

Now, this usage of separation occurs in a great variety of ways in Scripture in describing God. For instance, this passage in Leviticus chapter 11, verses 44 and 45. For I am the Lord your God, ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy, for I am holy.

Neither shall you defile yourselves with any manner of creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. For I am the Lord that bringeth you out of the land of Egypt to be your God, and therefore ye shall be holy or separate. For I am holy.

That passage obviously is describing the separation of the people of God from those who are not the people of God. So notice this passage in the eighth chapter of Isaiah, verse 13. Sanctify the Lord of hosts

himself, and let him be your fear, let him be your dread.

Now, that is not dealing so much with his moral perfection as the fact that he is set apart. He is not like anyone else, and he is not to be connected with or associated with others, but separated in our minds and our hearts. Well, think of these words in Exodus chapter 15 at verse 11.

Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praise, doing wonder? These same ideas carried out in Leviticus chapter 20 at verse 7. Sanctify yourselves, therefore, and be ye holy, for I am holy. And in Leviticus 20 at verse 26, and ye shall be holy unto me, for I, the Lord, am holy, and I have severed you, now get that, I have severed you from other people that ye should be mine. Clearly, holiness means set apart, separated from others who are unholy.

In these words in Isaiah 40, 25, to whom then will ye liken me, or to whom shall I be equal, saith the Holy One. And some of you ladies in particular may remember that great prayer that Hannah prayed in the Temple of Old, recorded in 1 Samuel chapter 2, and especially these words in verse 3, There is none holy as the Lord, for there is none beside thee, neither is there any rock like our rock. Now, if you made the study that I requested you to make for this week, of the terms holy and holiness and holiest, etc., as they appear in Scripture, where did you discover the first use of the term? Well, you didn't find it in Genesis, for it isn't there.

You found it in Exodus, and I wonder how many of you noticed how many times in Exodus the word is used in connection with some inanimate object. Time after time after time, it is used this way. For instance, it speaks of holy ground.

It speaks, in fact, that's the first usage, holy ground. Three, five, I think. It speaks of a holy convocation.

It speaks of a holy habitation. It speaks of a holy Sabbath. It speaks of a holy place and a most holy place.

It speaks of holy garments. It speaks of holy gifts. It speaks of a holy crown.

It speaks of holy flesh, in reference to the flesh of lamb. It speaks of a holy altar. And it speaks of anyone who touches the holy altar as being made holy.

It speaks of holy vessels. It speaks of holy perfume. And it speaks of holy incense.

All of those usages of the term holy found in the book of Exodus. Now, obviously, those references are not to moral purity. How can ointment be made morally pure? How can incense be purified so that it is without sin and without stain? Those references and an abundance of other references in Leviticus and elsewhere referring to inanimate things are referring to the matter of separating that which is commonplace or ordinary for a holy use.

Now, I say again that that is the primary usage of the term holy as it appears in Scripture. So, when we are hearing the words that Isaiah heard, holy, holy, holy, or those words uttered in the presence of John the Apostle, holy, holy, holy, we do not want to think merely in terms of the moral perfections of God. But we must think in terms of the fact that God is separate and distinct and apart from all of the rest of the creation.

Now, I have already announced to you the text that we are going to be focusing on in the moments to come. And I invite you now to turn with me to the 57th chapter of Isaiah, where we will read this text in its

setting. Isaiah at chapter 57.

This morning we want to expose ourselves to the God whose name is holy. And we want to put ourselves before him and allow the searching truth of his holiness to reach down into our hearts and our lives and to affect us and to alter us. Isaiah 57.

The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart. And merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come. He shall enter into peace.

They shall rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness. But draw near hither, ye sons of the sorceress, the seed of the adulterer and the whore. Against whom do you support yourselves? Against whom make ye a wide mouth and draw out the tongue? Are ye not children of transgression, a seed of falsehood, inflaming yourselves with idols under every green tree, slaying the children of the valleys under the clefts of the rocks? Among the smooth stones of the stream is thy portion.

They are thy lot. Even to them hast thou poured a drink offering. Thou hast offered a meat offering.

Should I receive comfort in thee? Upon a lofty and high mountain hast thou set thy bed. Even thither wentest thou to offer sacrifice. Behold, the door is also in the post.

Hast thou set up thy remembrance? For thou hast discovered thyself to another than me. And art gone up. Thou hast enlarged thy bed and made thee a covenant with them.

And thou lovest their bed where thou saw'st it. And thou wentest to the king with ointment and didst increase thy perfumes and didst send thy messengers afar off and didst debase thyself even unto hell. Thou art wearied in the greatness of thy way.

Yet sayest thou not there is no hope? Thou hast found the life of thine hand. Therefore thou wast not grieved. Into whom hast thou been afraid or feared that thou hast lied and hast not remembered me nor laid it to thy heart? Have not I held my peace even of old, and thou fearest me not? I will declare thy righteousness and thy works, for they shall not profit me.

When thou criest, let thy companies deliver thee. But the wind shall carry them all away. Vanity shall take them, but he that putteth his trust in me shall possess the land and shall inherit my holy mountain.

And shall say, cast thee up, cast thee up, prepare the way, take up the stumbling block out of the way of my people. For thus saith the high and lofty one that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy. I dwell in the high and holy place with him also that is of a concise and humble spirit.

To revive the spirit of the humble and to revive the heart of the contrite one. For I will not contend forever, neither will I be always wroth. For the spirit should fail before me in the souls which I have made.

For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth and smote him. I hid me and was wroth, and he went on forwardly in the way of his heart. I have seen his ways and will heal him.

I will lead him also and restore comforts unto him and to his mourners. I create the fruits of the lips. He, he, to him that is far off and to him that is near, saith the Lord, and I will heal him.

Thus the wicked are like the troubled sea when it cannot last, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked. Now there is the setting in which these momentous words occur.

Thus saith the High and Lofty One that inhabits this eternity, whose name is Holy. I dwell in the high and holy place with him also, that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble and to revive the heart of the contrite one. May God burn that text into our minds and our hearts this morning.

Now let us notice first off what this text teaches about God himself. First of all, we have a very plain declaration of God's position in the universe. Thus saith the High and the Lofty One.

I wonder if any of you have recently read the 40th chapter of Isaiah. If you have not done so, may I recommend it to you as being of utmost profit in connection with the contemplations before us this morning, Isaiah 40. Now here again, these words, thus saith the High and the Lofty One.

God's position in this universe explicitly declared in those words. Do I need to remind you that God is high above all men, above all angels, above all other created beings? When we began this series of studies on God, I directed your attention the first morning to the fact that God is the first cause. He and he only created everything, and absolutely nothing that is or has ever been is or was in and of itself.

God only is the beginning, the creator, the cause of everything else that exists. Now that in and of itself sets him apart. How can you compare anything which was created with that which was not created? How can you compare the made with the maker? Thus saith the High and Lofty One.

There are no other beings in his class, and there is simply no way that he can associate as an equal with anyone or anything. Now some of you may feel somewhat ashamed of yourself this morning, because God seems quite distant to you. Someone said to me, and I appreciated this statement very much, I don't hardly feel as if I know the Father.

I'm grateful though that I know Christ, and I'm able to draw near to him, but the Father seems so distant. Now don't be ashamed of that. Thus saith the High and the Lofty One.

God never intended that we mortals here on earth should be on an equal basis with him. It is not in the mind and heart of God that mere mortals should have a familiarity with the Eternal. It is not God's design that we feel that he is like our brother, and that we can speak to him or of him as if he were mere mortal.

It is by design that God is High and Lofty and Separate and Removed. And when those beings described in Isaiah and in the Revelation kept crying, Holy, Holy, Holy, it was because they had this ongoing awareness that God was not like them, that he was Separate, Distinct, High, and Lofty above them, and we ought at all times to have that conviction concerning God. We are unlike him.

And when Isaiah came into his presence and saw him in the remarkable way described in this prophecy, you remember as I do how he felt so unworthy and cried out, Depart from me! And he knew himself to be a man of unclean lips and an impure heart. No man approaches God with familiarity. His ways are not our ways, and his thoughts are not our thoughts.

Were you to go through the 40th chapter of Isaiah, of which I spoke a moment ago, you would discover a number of magnificent truths set forth in which God declares himself unlike his creation. For instance, the question is asked there, With whom has God ever taken counsel? Now, may I ask you, did God ever descend from his High and Lofty place to ask you what to do next? Did God ever convene a council to gain guidance? Is God moved by the impressive oratory of an American think tank? Is there any way that the Eternal God, who inhabits eternity and who describes himself as the High and Lofty One, can be affected by man's thoughts? There are some people on this earth, so feeble in their imagination and so

deluded in their thoughts, that they think that by thinking bad about God, they can affect God. There are some who think God can disappear when they say he is non-existent.

God has never found any inclination to counsel with any man, to hear any man's advice. He never will. Everything that exists, exists because he made it and sustains it, and nothing that he made or sustains is unequal with him and has the right or the ability to give him counsel or guidance.

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