

The Holy God

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- [0 : 00] Now I would like to turn to Isaiah chapter 6 again, bearing in mind Romans chapter 4 on the same theme.
- And I'm not really going to deal in any detail with the situation that Isaiah finds himself in here and what surrounds it.
- Oh my word, someone's not happy. But we are going to dwell on that theme of the holiness of God.
- Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty. That's what is very much the theme of this sermon today.
- So we remember that. I think that we are in some ways a society of, generally speaking, a society of little broken gods.
- [1 : 11] We probably don't often think of that and don't often, we would never think of describing other people or ourselves as that. But in many ways that's what we are. We're kind of just a whole lot of little broken gods.
- We don't image God. The sovereign God reveals himself as we ought to, when no sin is coming and is kind of distorted and broken that image.
- But rather than imaging him, we've usurped him. And I think that's right, oh, isn't it right from the very beginning? That is what Adam and Eve were tempted by.
- Satan says, you too, you can be like God as well, knowing good from evil. And that really has been the seed, the core of our rebellion all the way through is that we've usurped God.
- However differently that might look from Adam and Eve and what they did, that's what sin causes in our lives so that as societies, as people, as generations, what we've done is that we redefine what God reveals about himself.
- [2 : 18] For ourselves we redefine love, we redefine justice, we redefine morality and we make our God-like decisions about what these things should look like.
- And at the same time engage in a kind of act of self-worship. So there's this self is enthroned. The passage in Revelation is all about God being on the throne.
- This amazing picture of God being on the throne. And our greatest battle is ourself on the throne rather than God.
- And the reality of that has just been death to our soul, hasn't it? It has brought in physical death and separation from God, but also just is death to who and what we are as we try to be little broken gods apart from God and without God in our lives.
- And so we're looking, we're trying to, with God's help and by God's spirit, we're trying to learn more about God so that we can worship Him better.
- [3 : 25] And so that if we are not, if you're not a Christian today, you will bow the knee before Jesus Christ, who is God the Son and put your faith and trust, whatever it might be that is keeping you from Him.

Our prayer and our longing is that you will come to know and love Jesus Christ as King and as Head and as Lord and as Saviour.

So we're looking at the revelation God has given of himself in today is His holiness. And I'm sure we all come to that word with our own particular angle and perspective.

In the Bible holiness, it's very basic. Simply means something or something and it can be something, it needn't be someone, it can be something that's set apart for specific and special use, something that's separate and it comes to mean something that is other, something that is different, something that isn't like us.

And really that is the core of the teaching of God's holiness that He's not us. That's really the core of it. He's different from us. He's separate from us.

[4 : 40] He's not just us perfected and magnified a hundred or a million or a billion times. He's simply not us. He is God and He is holy and He is separate and He is set apart.

And yet the amazing thing about this truth is that Christ, some of that will go on to see this, that Christ shares that holiness with us, which is amazing really as we think, as we'll go on to think about that.

So the holiness of God, we're going to think about that just for a moment and what that means for us and how we share in that as Christians. So holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty.

That's what the seraphs, the seraphs, the angelic beings, whatever they were, we're not quite sure, but they were angelic beings and here they are wings covering their faces, with wings they're covering their feet, with wings they're flying.

And they're calling out to one another this antiphonal praise that they are crying out holy, holy, holy. They know who God is and they allow us to glimpse into an unseen world for a moment of who God is, that He is holy.

[6 : 00] And I think that speaks of at least two things. It speaks of His majestic transcendence. Can I use that phrase that He is majestic, sovereign, king-like and He's transcendent.

In other words, He's not close to us, He's far away from us at that level. He's transcendent, He's above us. He's described here as being thrice holy, holy, holy, holy.

Maybe there's glimpses there of the Trinity, maybe more than glimpses. Some commentators think it's just speaking of majesty, you know you repeat that three times in that magisterial kind of statement about who God is.

But holy, interestingly, holy when it's used of God, it's used of God more than anything else in the Bible to describe Him. Holy God, holy Lord, holy Jesus. It is the most common description of the character of God.

And it simply, and I think we've kind of forgotten that. Hemphasis, well maybe you don't mind, I struggle with that a little bit. And maybe the emphasis isn't enough on it as it should be.

[7 : 11] But it's used more than anything to describe God. His transcendent, this unparalleled separateness, beauty, purity, glory that He is.

The word means set apart or it could mean a kind of modern interpretation of the word could be that He's set a cut above.

You know we use that phrase? Because the original word, it meant cut, cut off, cut separate. So I suppose it could really mean that whole a cut above. It's just different from us in that amazing way.

He's so not like us. He's so not like us. He's so different from us. Isn't that amazing? We spend so much of our time thinking that we know God.

And we have Him in a box. And we contain Him. And we know better than other people. And I get other people who say, stupid, they don't see and know what we know. And we have Him all tied up.

[8 : 13] And yet He is so not like us. He is fearful in being so not like us. That's really what comes across here. And the voice of the seraphs causes the whole place to shake, the doorposts and thresholds to shoot.

And the temple was filled with smoke. And you know, maybe that's where we get the kind of smoke machine idea. Is it's got this idea of kind of fear and transcendence.

Doesn't really work, does it? But this wasn't a smoke machine. This was just the awesome sense of the cloud just covering too wholly to look on as it were.

And you know, Isaiah's response was, ruination. It is strange, isn't it? We think, wouldn't it be great to see more of God?

And yet we find throughout the Bible, and maybe say this a bit more later, that the response to people seeing a kind of glimpse of God was, ruination. Was terror. Was fear for abject fear for their lives because of His transcendence.

[9 : 16] Because of who He is, His separateness. His glory has all the different things we've looked at so far. So there's this transcendence, that's one thing.

And the other thing which is maybe what we think more of when we think of God as holy is His ethical perfections. Okay? We think of, yeah, holy God, you think He's a God who's pure or who's perfect or who is just.

And that's true. But it's much more than just that. It involves that and includes that. It's much more than that.

The holiness of God encapsulates all of these things. So we're never told in the Bible that He is, God is love, love, love. God is just, just, just.

God is pure, pure, pure. We're not told. The only time that's repeated is His holiness. It's Christ holiness. God is holy, holy, holy. But what He is, He's got, is a holy love.

[10 : 15] It's a holy purity. It's a holy justice. So His holiness really encapsulates all of His being and all of these other characteristics that we might attribute to God.

In His sinlessness, in His purity, in His justice, in His lovingness, in His holy hatred of sin and evil. That is a challenging thought for us as we kind of rub shoulders with and put our arms around sinful thoughts and behaviour.

It's something that He absolutely hates in His perfect holiness and will destroy because it separates us from Him and is the antithesis of who He is in all His perfection.

It's like He knows and He understands it's a cancer. You know, we think, God, how could He possibly be so dismiss or destructive towards sin?

We not just let off, but He knows it's a cancer that would destroy this universe if He doesn't deal with it. And we want to shrink that from kind of vague general ethical thoughts of the universe into our own lives, into our own hearts of sinners.

[11 : 32] God hates our sin and He will judge that as we will see. He has done that in His Son. It's just ethical perfection.

In many ways it sums up the different themes that we've had so far of God being this one God, this existing God, this unchanging God, this independent God, glorious, who is eternal, who's sovereign, who's creator.

And I just find it really difficult to say more than that. I find it difficult to put into words what His holiness means. And I appreciate and I recognise and I know that what we need most is God to reveal that to us through His Spirit.

Need that most together and we need that most as we live our lives in all that we do. So it's a holiness of God. And it's a holiness that's shared.

Now, theologians, and I'm not a theologian, but theologians tend to put everything in boxes, they systematise everything.

[12 : 40] And it's very difficult to systematise these things because there's so much overlap, much that doesn't transfer to us. But the Bible makes clear that He shares His holiness.

And that seems strange when we've just talked about Him being separate, being absolutely other, being not like us, being perfect in all His being. And yet the Bible makes clear that at some levels and in some ways He shares His holiness with us.

You see, our sin separates and intensifies our separation. And yet our salvation brings us to God and not just brings us to God, but God shares with us.

And that's a remarkable truth. So if we recognise and see and think about a couple of things, that God is absolutely separate and holy.

Now that was, one of the ways that was described in the Old Testament was with the temple and with the make-up of the temple. So it was divided into lots of things and it kind of got more and more exclusive the further you got into the middle of it.

[13 : 58] So the middle of it where the priests could only go once a year representing the people to atone for their sins was called the Holy of Holies.

And that was the place that symbolised God's presence. You couldn't just walk into it, you couldn't drift along and just walk into the Holy of Holies because you would be destroyed.

It was a really clear indication to the people. There was the Holy of Holies, then there was the Holy place, then there was the outer area and then there was the Gentile court and so on. There was separations all, till no one could get into this Holy of Holies.

And that was separate and completely separate because it was symbolising God's holiness, its unapproachability, separateness from us because He's holy, because He's perfect.

And then what we have is God in Christ, because remember we looked at the Trinity last week, God, the Son of God is Christ. Christ Jesus in His holiness coming, in His perfection, in His glory, He empties Himself of that glory as it were and empties Himself of not His holiness, but He empties Himself as it were of His separateness from us at that level and comes among us.

[15 : 23] He sees He becomes flesh, so He comes among us, comes into a sinful world. And that's amazing enough. But what does He do beyond that? Well, in 2 Corinthians 5, 21, we're told God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.

So you've got this sharing, amazing sharing going on where God asks us to give Him His sin as it were. He shares our sin.

He becomes sin. In all His holiness, in all His perfection, hatred of sin, He doesn't become a sinner, but He becomes sin. He becomes a representative for all our sin because He's going to pay the price for it.

So that's a remarkable truth of the holiness of God becoming involved in humanity and the perfect one being punished for our sin, for our evil and our death.

So holiness is personified in Jesus and yet Jesus faces and experiences and tastes hell, tastes the horror of hell in order that we might be holy and share in His holiness.

[16 : 46] So it's a kind of, a bit of a transaction going on. He takes in all His perfection, in all His hatred of sin.

I think we begin to understand why He sweats blood in Gethsemane as He faces that reality and the separation from His Father and all that goes with it.

And then on the cross what happens, what we told in Matthew, we're told that that curtain, that thick double curtain that is 80 feet high, it separates the holy of holies from the rest of the world is ripped in two from the top to the bottom.

He's going to share His holiness. He's going to let us into His presence. He's going to allow us access to Him. We don't need a human high priest once a year.

We have a high priest in Jesus Christ who has opened the way for us into His reality. That curtain ripped is a hugely significant event in the history of the world.

[17 : 51] We have no concept of how significant it is because He then shares His life, His grace and His holiness. We enter into His holiness, we enter into relationship.

What does that mean then? That we share in His holiness because so far it seems to be that holiness is something that God has that makes God God and we're not God and we're little broken gods in our sinfulness but He shares with us.

Well it means at least three things quickly. It means that we're set apart in the same way that holiness, that's what holiness means. It's set apart or separate.

So we are at that fundamental basic level if you can imagine it, we're just set apart for God as Christians. We've been called, we've been chosen, we've been sealed by His Holy Spirit and we're set apart.

The moment you believed in Jesus Christ you were made holy. Okay? You were made holy. Not perfect but you were made holy.

[18 : 57] You were covered in that righteousness that He might become, you know that we might become the righteousness of God. We become as holy in God's eyes as Jesus, we're covered in that righteousness that belongs to Jesus, it's a gift to us, it's free, we can't earn it ourselves.

We've been taken from death to life. We've been separated. You know if you deliberately separate something it's an act, it has to happen. You need to deliberately go and take it and move it somewhere else.

If you're setting something apart, don't touch that. I've set it apart. It's important. It's separate. We do that. It's a little bit, well God has done that with us. We're set apart.

We've moved from darkness to light. We've been made right with God. We're adopted. We're justified. All these theological terms and they're kind of transcendent.

In other words, you can't see them. When you become a Christian you don't see that you're set apart. There's not something that you know you can mystically move from one place to another. Now I'm set apart or you don't look different.

[20 : 00] Set apart. It's almost a transcendence. It's real but it's not something we can see but we believe. So we're set apart. Every Christian set apart.

You know you have hope and you have purpose and you have identity and you are loved and you're chosen and you're called. You're set apart. When you came to faith you responded by repentance and faith to Jesus.

You were called. It's a wonderful thing, wonderful truth and he's calling us through the gospel. We're not Christians. He's calling us to be set apart to him, to come and believe and trust in him.

But it means also being set apart from something, doesn't it? If you move from one place to another, if you're separated, you're separated from something. So we're separated from sin and from evil and from darkness in our hearts.

Not physically in the world but in our hearts. So you've got, for God, various verses, I'm just going to quote them quickly. I'll not give the references to it. For God did not call us to be impure but to live a holy life.

[21 : 06] Okay? We're to be an instrument, an instrument for noble purposes made for holy use. Useful to the master, doing good works. Don't conform to evil desires but just as he who called you as holy, so be holy in all you do for his written, be holy because I'm holy.

You must turn from evil and do good. Seek peace and pursue it. You see the emphasis of all the New Testament teaching has this separation from sin, from sinful heart, from sinful behaviour.

Repentance and faith takes us to that place. We see the beauty of Christ and when we see the beauty of Christ, we begin to see the ugliness of our own hearts and of our sinful, selfish, little God-like broken desires.

But we know that that being set apart from sin is no holiday, don't we? It's not a holiday for us in this life. Why? Well because we like the wrong things.

By nature our sinful hearts is that we like the wrong things and that remains in us as a battle as we seek to become more holy.

[22 : 17] We're set apart but we're also being sanctified, being set apart to be more holy. There is a kind of worldly holiness where people set themselves apart from one another, kind of tribalism.

That's not what we're speaking about. There is holiness, isn't there? A worldly holiness where people just hate one another and gossip and divide and curse and swear and kick each other in on Black Friday to get the best bargain.

All these kind of unholy things. But it is a form of separation but it's not godly holiness. But we like the wrong things in many ways and we enter civil war when we become Christians.

Civil war with our own hearts because the dethroned self in our heart, the defroined worship of self is defeated but it's not yet destroyed.

For me the only parallel, well I'm sure there's many palaces, one I can think of is a bit like the battle we have with wrong appetites. Junk food, liking junk food.

[23 : 31] We like junk food, we like lots of really sweet things because they taste great and quick and full of sugar and things like that. And it's really difficult sometimes because we're addicted, our bodies addicted to sugar.

It's difficult to eat healthily and that becomes a battle then for that and yet we know it's for our good. And at some level spiritually it's the same for us.

We struggle so often because we like the wrong things and we think that the healthy things are either boring or unattractive to do in our lives.

Do you think that's unreasonable that we have that battle? We can't think that's unreasonable if we understand the lengths that Jesus went to and the gift that he needs to give us in order to be holy.

That is his own holy spirit. That's the power of the universe he's needed to overcome sin. We sometimes skip around and think it's no problem for us, it's easy.

[24 : 31] Yet he's given us, he said, I need to give you the third person of the Trinity in your life, in your heart in order to overcome it. That's how deep the battle is, that's how deep the problem is and that's the amazing provision he's given us, he's given us his holy spirit.

It's hard for us because we like so many things and it's also hard for us because the world in which we live, we're going against the world in which we live. There is a sense in which we become transcendent as Christians, we become other, we become different, we become not like the world.

We're going against the tide because we think differently, we act differently, we have different ethics, we have different morality, we have a different way of living and that is a challenge.

It's a challenge for us. It's particularly a challenge when the whole of society is kind of no longer sympathetic even to basic Christian values at some levels.

Okay, so it means being set apart, it means being set apart from sin but it also means being set apart to God. So if you move from one place to another, you're leaving something but you have to be going somewhere and doing something and so we're set apart to God and that's a positive and important side of that and that's really positive.

[25 : 48] We need to think of that as a positive, we think of the prodigal son. He returns and his father's there without stretched arm. It's not a grudging return and he realises how much he's loved.

We are prodigal children and we come to a providing father and he is a holy God who has done the most beautiful thing at the most ugly event in history at the cross.

We're set apart to worship him. That's what we're called to do, to worship the living. Now that means a couple of things and I'll close with this. It means that our relationship with him is one of worship.

We belong, we belong to the living God. You see if we're to see God as he is, maybe even as he's revealed here, it should be absolutely terrifying.

It should be threatening because he is so holy and what the Bible says is that that will be the case for people at one point in the future who have not given their lives to him, not come to him for salvation.

[26 : 50] It will be terrifying to see the living God. But in Christ that terror is transformed. It's tempered and it becomes tempered by grace so that it turns from terror or it should at least for us to awe, to a sense of awe at who he is.

You know like Isaiah here or like Job when he met with God or like John in Revelation when he sees Jesus Christ, he says when I saw him I fell at his feet as dead.

You know he just simply collapsed at the feet of God like as if he was dead. Now we can cry Abba Father because of what Jesus has done but that doesn't mean that he is a sugar daddy.

It doesn't mean that he is a cheap father figure because Thomas when he saw Jesus says my Lord and my God, he's still transcendent to us and both in our personal worship and our public worship there should be that sense of transcendent.

We're going to finish our worship today with a red doxology. We're going to read the doxology together from Romans chapter 11:32 and it's just a reminder to us of the sense of awe that we should seek to have for God.

[28 : 13] And I think in our public worship too, you know we try and we aim and we pray that we do our best, that we perform our best, that we engage in the best way publicly, that we are technically good, that we're professional in our public worship but we know that none of that, none of that and not even a smoke machine would be able to sense the awe of God because that will come from your heart and mine as we reverently understand him and seek not to trivialise or make frivolous or make cheap or make profane our public worship.

It must always be reverential, it can be happy, it can be joyful, it can be informal but as we understand who God is, it will never be trivial and profane and we can never manufacture that sense of worship.

It's impossible to do, it's about our hearts leading us into holiness and living in holiness because we belong so there's this relationship of holy love with God but we also are encouraged as to our behaviour because it's worship as life, you know.

That verse in 1 Peter is be holy for I am holy because he called you as holy so be holy no you do for it's written be holy because I am holy.

That's where he shares with us this transcendent value of his holiness. He doesn't say be holy because or doesn't say be holy like I am holy, he says be holy because I am holy so be separate because he's separate.

[30 : 14] There's many ways we can't be like him but we share in that holiness in our separation to him and in the ethical and moral life that we live.

Romans 12 once he's set himself as living sacrifice is holy and acceptable to God which is our spiritual act of worship. So he wants us to live out our lives with Christ as Lord, love for others and ourselves last.

That we understand his commandments, that we understand idolatry, that we understand that we're not to abuse him or his day, we're not to be sexually impure, we're not to steal or to lie or to cheat or to covet, we're not to be sexually proud, sexually proud?

I didn't mean that, I was just reading my notes wrong but don't be sexually proud. Just don't be selfishly proud is actually what I meant to say.

I'm sure it would reveal itself in that area. Don't lack compassion, don't be careless, don't be immovable, don't be an isolate, don't ignore the New Testament unfolding of the Ten Commandments in the Sermon and the Mount and in the Pastoral Epistles and in the Gospels.

[31 : 38] Don't lower the standard because it's too tough. We're set apart and we're set apart to serve him, to consider our behaviour and to consider what it means to belong and to be holy.

I think it's underplayed today, I think maybe because it's hard, it's tough and we kind of shrug our shoulders and say well, it's all about love and Jesus loves me and he's paid the price.

But that inevitably means that we will eschew evil and hate it because it is the opposite of who he is and we'll not shrug our shoulders and we'll not partner with it and we will hate every atom that is evil and it drives us away from Jesus and from God and from His holiness and it will be a battle.

And in that battle we need each other, we really do. It's a tough battle and it's tough to be a Christian on your own, we need one another and he's called us into family, he's called us into fellowship, he's called us to be an army that fights together and we do that, we do holiness better together, we really do and we will then be doing mission.

When we're doing holiness, we'll be doing mission because we will be reflecting God and mission is about how we live and our lives triggering the questions that will enable us to share the faith of Jesus and about this God and about this curtain that was ripped into and about this access to the Father.

[33 : 25] That will attract the lost world in which we live. Amen, let's pray briefly together. Before God we ask and pray that you would help us to understand you better, that we would know more about your holiness, that we would be attracted to it.

We thank you that Isaiah speaks or the revelation is given in Isaiah before he goes to serve of your holiness and that vision of your holiness didn't paralyze him, didn't make him separate, didn't make him snobbish, didn't make him feel that he was better than others because of what he'd seen but enabled him to serve.

We thank you that it is again repeated in the last book that you have given us in the Bible and is the theme of heaven and so we ask that you'd help us to be holy.

We know it's a transcendent truth but we also know it's gritty and everyday and we pray that you'd help us to be gritty everyday holy Christians and that your spirit would fill us up and teach us and guide us and help us and that we would confess and seek forgiveness when we love the things you hate and ignore the things you love and sometimes even hate them.

So Lord help us we pray and we thank you that we are set apart and we thank you that we are people that are set apart not in a proud or arrogant way in any way at all but in a humbling way and in a motivational way.

[35 : 10] So help us God we pray. Amen.