

The Holiness of God - Part 1

by A.W. Tozer

The holiness of God is a mystery that is beyond human comprehension, and it is something that we can only glimpse through association and suggestion.

Duration: 15:06

Scripture: Exodus 15:11, Exodus 19:12-13, Exodus 19:16-19, Job 15:15, Job 25:6, Psalm 22:3, Proverbs 9:10

Topics: "Holiness Of God"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the holiness of God and the need for reverence and sanctification in His presence. He refers to the story of Moses encountering God at the burning bush and later on Mount Sinai. Moses, out of fear and awe, removed his shoes and hid his face. God instructed Moses to sanctify the people and set boundaries around the mountain, warning that anyone who touched it would be put to death. The preacher also reflects on the impurity and sinfulness of humanity, contrasting it with the purity and holiness of God.

Transcript

I am to speak tonight on the Holiness of God, and I want to read some passages. Exodus 15, Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like unto thee, glorious in holiness? Job 15, Behold, he putteth no trust in his saints, yea, the heavens are not clean in his sight. Job 25, Behold even to the moon, and it shineth not, yea, the stars are not pure in his sight.

How much less man that is a worm, and the son of man which is a worm. Psalm 22, Of thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel. Proverbs 9, 10, The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.

Isaiah 6, 3, One cried unto another and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, and the whole earth is full of his glory. They say that when Leonardo da Vinci painted his famous Last Supper, that he had little difficulty with any of it except the faces. Then he painted the faces in without too much trouble, except one.

He did not feel himself worthy to paint the face of Jesus. He held off and kept holding off, unwilling to approach it, but knowing he must. And then in the impulsive carelessness of despair, he just painted it quickly and let it go.

There's no use, he said, I can't paint it. In speaking on the holiness of God, I feel very much the same way. This last week, I rather suffered through this, and wondered why today and tonight I was able to get around it all.

But I think that same sense of despair is on my heart. There isn't any use for anybody to try. If it's an orator, he can play his oratorical harp, but it sounds tinny and unreal, and when he's through, you've listened to music that you haven't seen, God.

I suppose that the hardest thing about God to comprehend is his infinitude. I know that intellectually that's the hardest thing to grasp, but you can talk about the infinitude of God and not feel yourself a worm. But when you talk about the holiness of God, you have not only the problem of an intellectual grasp, but you have a sense of personal vileness which is almost too much to bear.

Now, the reason for this is that we are fallen beings. We are fallen spiritually, morally, mentally, and physically. We are fallen in all the ways that men can fall, being what they are.

And we are all, and each of us, born into a tainted world. We're born into a tainted world. And we learn impurity from our cradles.

We nurse it in with our mother's milk, we breathe it in the very air. Our education deepens it, and our experience confirms it. Evil impurities everywhere.

And everything is dirty. Even our whitest white is dingy gray. And our noblest heroes are soiled heroes, all of them.

So we learn to excuse and to overlook, and not to expect too much. We don't expect all truth from our teachers, and we don't expect all faithfulness from our politicians, and we quickly forgive them when they lie to us and vote for them again. And we don't expect honesty from the merchants, and we don't expect complete trustworthiness from anybody.

And we manage to get along in the world only by passing laws to protect ourselves from not only the criminal element, but from the best people there are, who might in the moment of temptation take advantage of us. So fallen man, being born in this kind of world, living here, breathing it in, it gets into his pores, it gets into his lungs, into his nerves, into his cells, until he has lost the ability to conceive of the holy. But I would speak of the holiness of God, or of the holy, or of the holy one, and we cannot comprehend this, and we certainly cannot define it, because holiness means purity, but that isn't enough.

Purity merely means that it's unmixed, there's nothing else in it. But that isn't enough. We talk of moral excellency, but that is inadequate, for we say to be morally excellent is to excel somebody else in moral character.

But about whom are we speaking? When we say that God is morally excellent, he excels somebody. Who is it that he excels? The angels, the seraphim, I suppose, but that isn't still enough. We mean rectitude, we mean honor, we mean truth and righteousness, and we mean all of these uncreated and eternal.

God is not now any holier than he ever was, for he, being unchanging and unchangeable, can never become holier than he is, and he never was holier than he is, and he'll never be any holier than now. And it means self-existent, for he did not get his holiness from anyone, nor from anywhere. He did not go off into some vast, infinitely distant realm and there absorb his holiness, but he is himself the holiness.

He is the holy. He is the all-holy. He is the holy one.

He is holiness itself, beyond the power of thought to grasp or of word to express, beyond the power of all praise. Now, language can't express the holy, so God resorts to association and suggestion. He cannot say it outright, because he would have to use words that we don't know the meaning of.

And we would then, of course, take the words he used and translate them downward into our terms. If he were to use a word describing his own holiness, we could not understand that word as he uttered it. He would have to translate it down into our unholiness.

If he were to tell us how white he is, we would translate it into terms of dingy gray. So God cannot tell us by language. So I say he uses association and suggestion by showing how it affects the unholy.

Moses at the burning bush, there before the holy fiery presence, knelt down, took his shoes from off his feet, hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God. Then here is this 19th chapter of Exodus later, where Moses, the Lord said unto him, Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and believe thee forever. And the Lord said to Moses, Go unto the people and sanctify them and let them wash their clothes, and be ready against the third day.

For the third day the Lord will come down in the sight of the people, and thou shalt set bounds unto the people, round about saying, Take heed to yourselves, that ye go not up into the mount, or touch the border of it. Whosoever toucheth the mount shall be surely put to death. There shall not a hand touch it, but he shall surely be stoned or shot through.

For there will be a beast of man that shall not live. When the trumpet soundeth long, they shall come up to the mount. Moses went down, sanctified the people.

You see, he did the best he could. He went down and tried to whiten up a little their dingy gray. And it came to pass on the third day in the morning that there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud, so that all the people trembled.

Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the nether part of the mount. Mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire, and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly. And the voice of the trumpet soundeth long and marcheth louder and louder, Moses answered God speaking.

God answered him by voice, and the Lord came down upon Mount Sinai on the top of the mount. And the Lord called Moses up to the top of the mount, and Moses went up, and the Lord said unto Moses, Go down, charge the people, lest they break through unto the Lord's gaze, and many of them perish. Now, there was an effort on the part of God.

All this trumpet, the sound of the trumpet, and the voice of words, and the fire and the smoke and the shaking of the mount, it was an effort for God to say by suggestion and association what he couldn't say in words. Now, there are two words for holy. There are more than two, but there are particularly two words for holy in the Hebrew Bible, and one word is used almost exclusively of God the Holy One.

Rarely used ever of anything or person except God the Holy One. In that passage in Proverbs 9.10, the knowledge of the holy that I read in your hearing, where it says, The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the holy is understanding. This intrigued me.

In fact, the book that I'm going to write on the attributes of God devotionally considered is to be called The Knowledge of the Holy. Well, I have been greatly fascinated by this, that it should occur in our Bible that this word, that we should have it in the abstract, the holy, rather than the holy one. And yet, the Jewish Bible says, The knowledge of the holy one, and in 33 of Proverbs, that is, 33, where it uses also the knowledge of the holy, it says, The knowledge of the holy one, or the all-holy.

And though the King James translators called this the knowledge of the holy, they used exactly the same word more than forty times and translated it the holy one, the holy one of Israel. So obviously this is God, and yet there is a vagueness enough about it that the translators felt free to put this into an abstraction, to make it abstract and call it the holy. Now, there's another word, and that's not used of God very often.

I think it is not his high word. It is used of created things often. It is something that, so to speak, is holy by contact or association with this other holy.

That is, we hear of the holy ground, and when it says this is holy ground, or holy sabbath, or holy city, or holy habitation, or holy people, or holy works, or holy arm, it's not the same awesome, awful word that he uses when he says the holy, or the holy one. Now, in the New Testament, and I have not read from the New Testament tonight, but in the New Testament we have a word, of course, the Greek word, and we talk there about God being holy, be ye holy for I am holy, and I notice one thing about that Greek word. It is that a definition of it is awful thing.

Now, think of that. Take and set that word thing in capital letters, the awful thing. That's one meaning of the word holy, the holy one.

Now, let's talk a little about the holy one and his creatures.

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