

# A Generation Passionate for God's Holiness

by John Piper

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding and experiencing the holiness of God, which is His absolute uniqueness and moral perfection, and how it changes our view of sin, righteousness, the cross, and missions.*

**Duration:** 34:01

**Scripture:** Isaiah 6:1

**Topics:** "Gods Holiness", "Christian Reverence"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on his experience watching the movie 'The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers' and how it made him admire and tremble at Jesus Christ. He compares the events in the movie, which took place on a small planet in a vast universe, to the power and greatness of Jesus Christ, who created the entire universe with a flick of his finger. The speaker emphasizes the importance of recognizing the true magnitude of Jesus' power and glory, and encourages the audience to have a deep reverence for him. He also contrasts the self-sacrificial nature of Christianity with the violent methods of radical Islam, stating that Christians are called to lay down their lives to spread the message of Christ.

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## Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from Desiring God is available at [www.DesiringGod.org](http://www.DesiringGod.org) The aim of one day is to be a gathering and an awakening of a generation passionate for God's renown. That was true three years ago and it's true today only the words have changed a little bit today.

You read in the material that you received, you hear on the CDs, the words are words like sacred and holy and his and so I'm going to change it just slightly and say that the aim of our one day is the gathering and the awakening of a generation passionate for the holiness of God. If this generation were to become passionate for the holiness of God, then all the campuses in America, and I don't just mean southern campuses, I mean campuses in Oregon and Washington and Idaho, campuses in Maine and New Hampshire and Connecticut and Massachusetts, all the campuses of America and all the peoples, and I don't just mean the the peoples to whom we have access, I mean the peoples in China and North Korea, in Vietnam, the peoples in Iraq and Afghanistan, the peoples in Algeria and Tunisia, I mean all the peoples in the world will say in response to what God does here today and beyond today, they will say there is none holy like the Lord, there is no rock like our God. 20 years ago I decided to make an experiment on a

Sunday morning.

I decided that I would preach from Isaiah 6, you're very familiar with that great text, and I would not make any practical application at all. I just wanted to see what would happen to a few hundred people if they just saw, as best as I could paint it, the holiness of God lifted up without any application to their lives whatsoever. So I simply read the text.

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord high, lifted up, seated upon a throne, and His train, the train of His robe, filled the temple. And above Him stood the seraphim, each had six wings, and with two they covered their face, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew, and one cried to the other, holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory. And at that voice, the threshold of the temple shook, and the house was filled with smoke.

And all I did was point to the throne, and I said probably, let's do it here in Sherman, there would be one leg of the throne back over on that side of the hill, and another leg on that side of the hill, and another leg way over there as far as you can see, and another leg over there, and it would be about 800 feet high, and Jesus Christ and God Almighty would be sitting upon that throne. And these seraphim are not these little cherubs that you see in Peter Paul Ruben's paintings, little fat Cupid-like dolls. These seraphim, if they stretch forth their wings, disappear into the clouds that way, and that way.

And the reason I know that is because it says when one of them spoke, the whole foundation of heaven, which is not easy to shake, the whole foundation of heaven shook. And so the scene that you have is supposed to silence us, frighten us, humble us, terrify us, expose us, lay us bare. And all I did was talk about that scene, and I didn't say anything about your daily life, your marriage, children.

We're supposed to be moved. Well, it's strange what moves people today. Last December, I did what almost all of you did, and I went and watched the two towers, second in the trilogy of the Lord of the Rings, and I was stunned by the sequence of events with big, great, triumphant walking trees, and boulders being lobbed out of the castle and smashing the Sauron hordes to pieces, and Legolas skateboarding down the castle, shooting his bow as he went, and the great, perfect, white horse arrival charging into the hordes of Saruman.

I loved it. It was my anniversary, number 34, and we went out to dinner afterwards, and I said to Noelle, you know what I like about that movie most? It made me admire and tremble at Jesus Christ more. And she said, why is that? I said, because as I sat there watching, I thought, now, even if these events were true, they took place on an earth or Middle Earth, and Earth is a small planet in a solar system about seven billion miles across, and the solar system is just a small little system in the Milky Way galaxy, which is about 600,000 trillion miles across, and the galaxy that we live in is a modest, relatively large-sized galaxy in a universe that probably has about a hundred million such galaxies in it, and Jesus Christ put this in place with the flick of his little finger.

So next time you sit in a theater and you're amazed, do some translation. Let your heart tremble at what is really big, what is really amazing. Jesus Christ, in the beginning, was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. He flung it out with the flick of his little finger. If you're going to be amazed at cinematography, look around or get a telescope.

Now, I finished my sermon. Not a word of application. Little did I know that in the audience that day was a couple, husband and a wife, who just that week had heard that their daughters had been sexually molested for the last three years by trusted relatives.

They were now all under medical care. He was now under arrest. There were venereal warts.

It was the most horrible thing of their lives, and they sat there under the preaching of no application and Isaiah 6 and the holiness of God, just the holiness of God. Three months later, the husband came to me and said something I will never forget. It has a lot to do with what I'm saying today and how I'm saying it.

He said, John, these have been the worst months of our lives. You know what's gotten us through? The vision of God's holiness from last January. It's been the only rock in our lives.

Your generation can get it, and I pray that you would become passionate for the holiness of God, that you would see and live in the brightness of his blazing holiness, that you would feel in your life the weight of the rock of his holiness. Could it be that your struggle with pornography, masturbation, fornication, Josh will talk to you about later, might find the liberty that you've been aching for in the rock of God's holiness, pure and simple, seen and bowed before. Could it be that your struggle with an eating disorder or with food from morning till night might find the liberty and the freedom that you've been aching for in the sheer weight of the rock of God's holiness.

Could it be that when you wake up someday, as happened to one man recently, to the sound of his wife bludgeoning his children to death on the front lawn, one rock would get you through those days, namely the rock of God's sovereign, gracious holiness. And could it be that the 200,000 that I so ache for and long for, pray for, preach for in this generation might arise if their hearts were impassioned by a glimpse of the holiness of God. That's my assumption, that those kinds of things could happen if this generation became passionate for the holiness of God.

So I ask, what stands in the way? And I only have two things to mention. Number one, most Christians today, and I assume you're included, don't know what the holiness of God is. I doubt that you could give a five-minute talk right now about the biblical meaning of the holiness of God.

There's a reason for that, and it isn't all your fault. Definitions, when it comes to God, are hard to come by. Definitions all depend on putting things in classes, using analogies.

If I ask you, what's a rabbit? I've never seen a rabbit. What's a rabbit? You say, well, it's a small, furry mammal that has long ears and chews a cud. Now, my mind at that point would say, small.

I know what small is. I've seen small things. Furry, I've seen cats.

I know what that is. Mammal, I know what that is. I had a hamster one time.

Ears, I've got one, and if it's long, I can imagine that. Chews a cud, I've seen a cow. Okay, I think I've got a little composite rabbit in my head.

You know what? You can't do that with God. There's a reason. If you say, what is God, or what is holy God? There aren't any classes to point to.

There aren't any categories. He is absolutely one of a kind, which makes definitions almost impossible with God. Defining God, who has no analogies, is very difficult.

You might say, well, we are sort of in His image and sort of have some righteousness and some power and some intelligence and some morality, and so you can point to us and then back to God. The problem with that is God defines you. You don't define Him.

God is definer. We are defined. You try to move from us to God instead of from God to us, you will skew Him badly, which is one of the great errors of our generation, inferring from our imperfections what God is like.

So what can we say about the holiness of God? Let me try. Let me at least try. I think it would be biblical to say that the holiness of God is rooted exactly in God's inability to be defined.

It's paradoxical, but let me say it like this. God's holiness is His absolute uniqueness. God's holiness is His incomparable-ness.

God's holiness is precisely the fact that there is none other. That's what you read in Isaiah 40, 25. To whom will you compare me that I should be like Him, says the Holy One.

Or Hannah's words in 1 Samuel 2, there is none holy like the Lord. There is no God besides you. There is no rock like our God.

Many of you have heard holy means separate. Well, yes, in this sense, when you talk about God, separate into a class by Himself, utterly separated from all that is not God, constitutes Him as absolutely unique, incomparable, and thus holy. But that's not enough.

That's not enough. Here's the problem with that definition. There's no qualitative content to it.

There's no moral quality. You say, unique in what? Incomparable in what? Now, the biblical answer to that question is going to be incomparable in absolutely perfect moral perfection. Moral perfection is what He's incomparable in.

He's incomparable in every other good way, but incomparable in His unique, incomparable, divine, moral perfection. So His grace is holy. His love is holy.

His wisdom is holy to the degree that that grace, that love, and all of His other attributes are unique in the universe and incomparable in the universe in their divine, moral perfection. And that's not enough of a definition either. We need to take it one more step.

When something is unique, it's really rare. It's absolutely rare. So I asked Noelle on Friday night, my wife, why is gold used as the standard of our money? Why do we prize gold so highly? And she said, accurately, because it's rare.

I said, yeah, but there are fish. There are fish that are really rare. And she said, gold has some permanence.

Fish rot, get smelly. They can't be the standard of anything, no matter how rare they are. I said, that's right.

So you've got rare and you've got permanence. And I would add accessibility. There are rocks probably under this field so far down, way more rare than gold, but you can't get at them.

And so they're useless. They're no help to being the monetary standard at all. And there are fish in the bottom of the sea nobody's ever caught or even classified and they're no use either.

So you've got rare, you've got permanence, and you've got accessibility. And I think the uniqueness of God is all of that. He's the rarest of all beings.

He has absolute permanence in Jesus Christ. He's made himself accessible. And therefore, I draw this as my concluding definition.

You allow me a definition of the indefinable? God is infinitely valuable. So here's my total definition. God's holiness is his infinite value as the absolutely unique, morally perfect, permanent person that he is and who by grace has made himself accessible.

His infinite value as the absolutely unique, morally perfect, permanent person that he is. And now my prayer for the generation becomes not simply that you become a generation impassioned for, passionate for God's holiness, but that you become a generation passionate for God's supreme, infinite value. That will sever the root of all Judas joys.

One last obstacle I would mention to becoming that generation, and I feel bad about this one because it's my generation's fault. We have not served you well. I'm 57, I'm old enough to be some of your grandfather probably and all of your father.

I think in terms of these generations, not only do you have a hard time living with a passion for the glory of God because you don't know what it is because it's so hard to define, which is not all your fault because he's God, but also because we have taught you so wrongly about the gospel. We have made the gospel, my generation, the generation of the self and the me, have made you the center of the gospel. We've made you the center of God's saving and redeeming work, not the display of his glory for the nations.

And if you wonder what's the relationship between glory and holiness, I'll put it in a little easy phrase. The glory of God is the radiance, the streaming forth of his intrinsic holiness. Holiness is his infinite value and his moral perfection as the unique and incomparable person that he is.

His glory is when that goes public for people to see and fall down before. And we have said to you, the gospel is about you and your worth. The cross is about you and your worth.

That's what my generation has delivered in ten thousand ways to you. And I would be surprised today, apart from a marvelous grace in your home church, that you don't believe that. God's passion.

Have you ever heard a sequence of thought like this? Before you ever came on the scene or this universe ever existed, God was holy, infinitely valuable, incomparable, absolutely unique. And he knew it and he loved it and he treasured it because he's wise and righteous. And a righteous person always values what is most valuable.

Therefore, before you ever came on the scene, God valued God above all things. He saw the perfections of himself shining out of his own infinitely glorious divine Son. And he loved his Son and the Son loved the Father.

And the Holy Spirit powerfully, personally radiated between the Father and the Son before you were ever on the scene, there was a gladsumness in reality. And then you came, and I'll tell you something, nothing

changed. God did not suddenly become an idolater when he created man, putting man where God belongs.

God is not a man worshipper. God is a God worshipper. Or would you deny him the highest joys of the universe? But we did not tell you that.

We bred you on your self-centeredness. We taught you a gospel of self-esteem that heals all diseases. And we put God on the periphery as a means to your self-exaltation.

And so there's a great barrier. There's a great barrier here. My generation has failed itself and you in so many ways.

You are not the center of God's values. The glory of God is the center of his value. You're not the center of his redeeming work.

The magnifying of Christ in your life is the center of his redeeming work. You are not the treasure of the gospel. God is the treasure of the gospel.

Here's a test. You ready? Just a one question test to see whether or not you know what it is to be loved by God. Whether or not you know what it is to experience the love of God in your life.

Because my generation has sold you a bill of goods on what that means. We have told you in a thousand ways to be loved by God is to be made much of. Some of you can't even conceive of another definition of love than to be made much of.

God loves me. He makes much of me. Now here's the test.

Do you feel more loved by God when he makes much of you or when he at the cost of his son's life gives you the ability to enjoy making much of him forever? I'm gonna state the test question again. You do the answering in your heart and then you'll know whether you have to experience a Copernican Revolution at one day 03. Do you feel more loved by God when he makes much of you or do you feel more loved by God when he undertakes through the cross and the Holy Spirit to enable you to experience a kind of inner revolution that you enjoy making making much of him forever? That's the test question for this generation.

My generation failed it. We still do. We're still delivering the wrong books, the wrong sermons, the wrong message to this generation all about me, all about my value.

We stand before the Holy Cross of God Almighty and take it as an echo of my worth instead of as an echo of the horror of demeaning the worth of God, which is what sin is and which is why the cross was necessary. I count everything is lost for the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord. Jesus is the Holy One.

That's what the devil is recognized. What do you have to do with us, Holy One of God? Jesus is the holiness of God made accessible. Jesus is the holiness of God made tolerable.

Indeed, Jesus is the holiness of God made enjoyable. If we can get low enough and tremble hard enough and rend our souls deeply enough that we understand what holiness is and required of Jesus. You were made to feast on Jesus.

You were made to feast on holiness found in Jesus. So let me ask you, what is the love of God? What is it to be loved by God? And the answer is that God sustains and exalts his holiness for your enjoyment forever. That's the love of God.

I'll say it again. The love of God is his passion to sustain and uphold and exalt his holiness in his Son for your everlasting enjoyment. If you put yourself at the center, you're suicidal because it robs you of the very glory of God and his enjoyment.

Now, in closing, if this happens, and I pray it happens, that God would turn this generation into a generation passionate for the holiness of God. Everything would change. Everything would change.

Your view of sin would change if he gave you a passion for the holiness of God. You would no longer think in terms of sin as the damaging of man, but as the dishonoring of God. You would no longer think of sin as the choice of pleasure, but the loss of pleasure.

It would change the way you view the righteousness of God. You would no longer think of the righteousness of God of simply doing what is right by you. You would think the righteousness of God is his unswerving allegiance to always be right by himself, that is, to exalt what is infinitely worthy, namely, his holiness and his glory.

It would change the way you look at the cross. Oh, it would be precious. You would sing, I love the cross, I love the cross.

But you would sing about your love for the cross, not like you're told in so many books and so many sermons, that there you can see how much you were valuable to God. But rather, you would stand at the cross and see two things. You would see how infinitely valuable the holiness, the righteousness, and the honor of God is, that when you trampled it underfoot by your sins, God knew the only way to vindicate his righteousness was to slay his own son.

That's how serious your sin is. That's how glorious God is. It's not about your worth.

And the other thing that you will see at the cross is that this is how much he was willing to pay to make you happy in his holiness. If you will be changed, I close with one last implication. Missions.

If you fall in love with the holiness of God, trembling, it's a dangerous place to be. Your attitude towards the nations, the unreached peoples of the world, will undergo a profound change. In the year the king Uzziah died, I saw the Lord high and lifted up, seated upon a throne, and his train filled the temple.

And above him stood the seraphim, each had six wings, and with two they covered their face, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one cried to the other, holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. And then the next missionary phrase, the whole earth is full of his glory.

You see the connection between the intrinsic holy, holy, holy, and then the public fullness of glory. If you become a generation, and I pray that this number would be the tithes of the 200,000, you will lay down your lives unlike radical Islam that take lives to spread their religion. You will not kill to spread Christianity.

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