

THE LORD OUR GOD IS HOLY!

Psalm 99: 1-9 and Joshua 24: 14-21 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

Pastor and author, Tony Evans once said this about God: He is right and I quote him. He said, “Holiness is the centerpiece of all of God’s attributes. Of all the things God is, at the center of His being, God is holy. Never in the Bible is God called, love, love, love, or eternal, eternal, eternal, or truth, truth, truth. On this aspect of His character, God has laid the most stress! God is indeed called, Holy Holy Holy!” If holiness is the centerpiece of all God’s attributes, then Isaiah 6: 1-8 is the centerpiece of His holiness in the Bible. There we read, “In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of His robe filled the temple. 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. And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!” And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of Him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!” Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.” And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?” Then I said, “Here I am! Send me.”

There is probably no attribute of God which needs to be taught and recognized more in our day than the holiness of God. One of our professors at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School back in the 1960’s, David Wells, emphasized this in his book written in 1994, “God in the Wasteland.” On page 114, David Wells gives his analysis of how modern culture has infected our churches. He states, “We have turned to a God that we can use rather than to a God we must obey; we have turned to a God who will fulfill all our needs rather than to a God before whom we must surrender our rights to ourselves. He is a God for us, for our satisfaction—not because we have learned to think of Him this way through Christ, but because we have learned to think of Him this way through the marketplace. In the marketplace, everything is for us, for our pleasure, for our satisfaction, and we have come to assume that it must be so in the church as well. And so, we transform the God of mercy into a God who is at our mercy.” David Wells goes on to say, on page 136, “The modern church is infatuated with the love of God and embarrassed at his holiness. We are more enamored with the therapeutic and psychological “uses” of God to provide us with inner peace, than we are with the fact that He is holy and

therefore, we must be holy. And if we do not revere God as holy, then He rests lightly on us. We take Him or leave Him to the degree that we find Him useful.”

So as we look at this Psalm, note that verse 3 ends in **“Holy is He!”** Verse 5 ends in **“Holy is He!”** Verse 9 ends in **“For the Lord our God is Holy!”** God is holy, holy, holy. So what is this word holy all about? The Hebrew word is qadowsh and it means sacred and hallowed, set apart, separate and sanctified. This word is what sets us all apart from God. He alone is totally “Holy, holy, holy.” God is wholly other and yet He chooses to fraternize with us. In Hosea 11: 9, God says, “For I am God and not a man, the Holy One in your midst.” John in his Gospel in John 1: 14 tells us, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. “ What I ask you today is, “How is God the Holy One in our midst?” And the immediate answer is—“He is holy in His kingship for the first words of Psalm 99 read, “The Lord reigns, let the peoples tremble!” So let me define the question a bit more—How is God the holy King in our midst? What kind of a holy King do we tremble before? I see three vital answers in this psalm on what kind of a holy King the Lord is.

THE KING IN HIS REIGNING IS THE LEVELER OF ALL PEOPLE—FOR THE GROUND IS LEVEL AT THE FOOT OF THE CROSS. (I.) What leveling the King’s holiness brings. V. 1-3 in the first strophe or stanza of this psalm. “The LORD reigns; let the peoples tremble! He sits enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth quake! The LORD is great in Zion; He is exalted over all the peoples. Let them praise Your great and awesome name! Holy is He!” The emphasis here is on God’s holy eternal power, His holy permanence in His glory, His greatness and His goodness as He reigns. John heard voices of a great multitude in heaven proclaim—that includes all Jesus’ Bride. In Rev. 19:6, 7 we hear the shout, “Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.” Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns. Until that glorious day of consummation, we should take great comfort in the fact that “the Lord reigns.” How does He reign? Three ways:

Notice God’s holy glory leveling all people in verse 1. (1) “The LORD reigns; let the peoples tremble! He sits enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth quake!” If you haven’t fallen on your knees before the Lord, it is certain that one day you will. Philippians 2: 10 tells us that at the name of Jesus, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Isaiah later wrote in Isaiah 66: 2, “But this is the one to whom I will look; he who is humble and contrite in Spirit and who trembles at My word.” Beloved, when

God begins to show us His holy glory and that He is seated on His throne, enthroned upon the cherubim, we will be filled with awe and wonder and praise. These cherubim, these winged creatures around God's heavenly throne are more than decorative living creatures around the glorious throne of God. They are beings God created to never cease to cry out, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory." As God sits between the cherubim, in His glory, He is high and lifted up, separate from His creation. As God is seen first in heaven, the people tremble, the earth quakes and staggers.

Notice God's holy greatness leveling all people in verse 2. (2) "The Lord is great in Zion; He is exalted over all the peoples." This second vision of the psalmist of the Lord has God not in heaven but on earth, great among His people Zion. And beloved, we are grafted into the Zion of God, the Israel of God as Paul calls us in Galatians 6: 14. And when people actually see the Lord in our lives, they don't ultimately notice us, verse 2, no, they see the Lord exalted over all the peoples and especially over us, His Bride, His church, His Zion. (3) **Notice God's holy goodness leveling all people in verse 3.** I read, "Let them praise Your great and awesome Name! The Hebrew word for greatness for God's name is **gadol**. **Gadol** means great in every sense, valuable, of un-estimated worth and goodness. We sing, "His Name is Wonderful." We sing—"God is so good." This reminds me of the sweet table prayer, "God is great and God is good, and we thank You for our food. By Your hand we all are fed, Give us Lord our daily bread. Amen." This goodness and greatness includes and surrounds God's awesome Name. This Hebrew word for awesome is **yawray**. **Yawray** means to reverence and stand in awe. Because the Lord is holy, worship Him in reverent intimacy, with a submissive heart. This is the reason why we worship—that's why we read in verse 3—"Let them (referring to all the peoples in v. 2,) let all the peoples praise your great and awesome Name! What name is that?"

Here it comes! Beloved, let this holy Name be Holy Fire on your lips. Notice the last word of Psalm 99: 3—What is this Name? **HOLY IS HE!** What a Leveler this mighty Name is in God's Holy glory, in God's Holy greatness and in God's holy goodness. Say this Name with me—three times—say it—"Holy is He, Holy is He, Holy is He. What kind of a Holy King do we tremble before? He is the Leveler of all peoples. And when we tremble and quake and praise Him, it is with a disciplined, chastened awe, for God is all that stirs us and when we sin, God is all that shames us. As believers, we know what it is to receive the needed rod of God. We know what it is in sin and shame to cry out with Isaiah, "Woe is me! For I am lost/undone; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" How profound is

the reverence we owe Him—Holy is He. Beloved, tremble before the Lord today—Holy is He! Secondly, what kind of a Holy King do we tremble before? He is not only the Leveler of all peoples, but:

THE KING IN HIS MIGHT IS THE LOVER OF JUSTICE. (II.) What love of justice the King's holiness brings. V. 4-5. "The King in his might loves justice. You have established equity; You have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob. Exalt the LORD our God; worship at His footstool! Holy is He!" God is a Holy Lover—a Holy Lover of Justice. This loving of our Holy Lover is the love of judgment or justice. The Hebrew word is **mishpawt**. Mishpawt means a verdict, favorable or unfavorable. In verses 4-5, God is a lover, a lover of justice, and He sees to it that justice is established in "Jacob," that is, in Israel. Here the reason for us to praise the Lord and worship at His footstool, the reason we are to exalt Him is that our God loves justice. We sing praises because of God's love for justice. Mishpawt means sitting in judgment to render a righteous verdict. Mishpawt is illustrated in the Book of Ecclesiastes in Eccl. 12: 14, which declares, "For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or bad." Yet mishpawt can also mean being in proper relationship to God in our own judgment. I read in Genesis 18: 19, the words God speaks of Abraham. "For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has promised him." Beloved, the Lover of justice wants us to love His justice and to seek to command our children and our household, all our family to keep the way of the Lord. Part of the reason God chooses to own us as His own is so we will take His love of justice and sow it in our families, so it will sprout and come up in a harvest of justice and a love of justice that never ends.

The psalmist's use of "Jacob" is doubtless referring to the nation of Israel. God is not impartial and He has no favorites who get off the hook, and whom He overlooks. No, God loves justice. He also judged Jacob himself for his evil deceit and scheming. God gets to the bottom of everything. Beloved, are you maintaining a secret part or place in your life where you won't let others know really what you are up to. God hates sin, including secret sin, and all sins that try to hide from God and others. And God loves justice. Get ready. Unless you and I confess such secret sins and repent and turn away from our sin, be prepared for exposure—full exposure. God will not overlook a single solitary thing, no matter how big or small. He loves justice. He is a lover of justice and judgment. He will not rest until justice is served. Have you been unfairly dealt with? God is on the throne. He knows and He loves to set the record straight, and He will set it straight. He executes righteousness and justice in Jacob, or Israel—that is, among His people. So exalt

the Lord with me, worship at His footstool. Why? It's because of His Name. What is that Name. I read it with reverence. "Holy is He!" Here is this Name again. Say it three times with me. "Holy is He! Holy is He! Holy is He!" I read this week about a Christian professor at a Christian college who mentioned the fear of the Lord in his classroom. When he saw the askance looks on some of his students, he was stunned when all of his students argued with him that we should not fear God, because it is opposed to His love! Beloved, my God's love extends to His love of justice. I worship at his footstool. That's at His feet. And I remind us all that the Word of God is clear in Proverbs 1: 7 – "The fear or reverence of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge and wisdom." Thirdly, what kind of a Holy King do we tremble before? He is not only in His reigning, the Leveler of all peoples, He is not only in His might, the Lover of all justice, but thirdly,

THE KING IN HIS RESPONSE TO HIS REDEEMED IS THE LISTENER AND ANSWERER TO OUR EVERY CALL. (III.)

What a listening ear the King's holiness brings. Just try to call up President Obama and tell me what response you get. Just call up Governor Matt Mead and tell me what response you get. But listen to the word of the Lord in Psalm 99: 6-9. "Moses and Aaron were among His priests, Samuel also was among those who called upon His name. They called to the LORD, and He answered them. In the pillar of the cloud He spoke to them; they kept His testimonies and the statute that He gave them. O LORD our God, you answered them; you were a forgiving God to them, but an avenger of their wrongdoings. Exalt the LORD our God, and worship at His holy mountain; for the LORD our God is holy!"

Think of it! Most calls we make are calls that have us pushing 1 for this problem, 2 for that problem, and 3 for another problem and 4 if we want to leave a message. Doesn't it sometimes drive you up the wall? What do all of us yearn for? Just give me a real live person to talk to. The emphasis in these verses is on the nearness of our holy God, who responds to the cries of His people in distress. Moses and Aaron bridged the gap between God and the people at the time of the Exodus. They called on the Lord for help and the Lord answered. Samuel called on the Lord for help and the Lord answered. Verse 8 declares, "O Lord our God, You answered them; You were a forgiving God to them." This is a reason for praise, v. 9—"Exalt the Lord our God, and worship at His holy mountain. Why? **"For the Lord our God is holy."** Say it with me three times. "For the Lord our God is holy!" "For the Lord our God is holy!" "For the Lord our God is holy!" What an invitation this is for God's people to pray this psalm and to call upon the Lord to receive His help and His forgiveness. But listen to the psalmist's fear and reverence of the Lord in verse 8.

God is not only an answering and forgiving God, but He is “the avenger of our wrongdoings.” This shows the balance between God’s faithfulness in answering prayer, His mercy in forgiving sin, and His righteousness in imposing punishment for sin in sinners, and discipline to all of us as His children when we choose to say no to His will for us. We do not take His mercy lightly or take it for granted. We must never sin with the thought that we will sin again because grace will abound and that always God will extend His grace and forgiveness. Our sin always carries with it, severe consequences in damaging people and in tarnishing the Lord’s glory. Yet when we have sinned, and we truly repent, we can come to Jesus and plead the blood of Jesus for His mercy. (I John 1: 9) Even in the face of our sin that God forgives over and over, He is not ashamed, verse 9 to be called “the Lord our God.” Who do we have in Jesus when we come to cry out to Him? The author of Hebrews tells us in Hebrews 12: 22-24, 28-29, “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel... Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.”

As we close today, I call us to holiness for the Lord our God is holy. In the forests of northern Europe and Asia lives a little animal called the ermine, known for his snow-white fur in winter. He instinctively protects his white coat against anything that would soil it. Fur hunters take advantage of this ermine’s unusual trait. They don’t set a snare to catch him. Instead, they find his home, which is usually a cleft in a rock or a hollow in an old tree. They smear the entrance and interior of the ermine’s home with grime. Then the hunters set their dogs loose to find and chase the ermine. The frightened animal flees toward home but doesn’t enter because of the filth. Rather than soil his white coat, he is trapped by the dogs and captured while preserving his purity. For the ermine, purity is more precious than life. Beloved, I call us all to holiness and purity. May our reverence before our Holy Lord make us respond to sin, willing to face death itself rather than soiling our garments with sin. Remember the words of Jesus in Revelation 3: 4-6 to the soiled church of Sardis, “Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy. The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before His angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” May our Holy God draw us to tremble before His footstool. Amen.