

The Holy God

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[0:00] Okay, as we begin this morning, as we prepare to hear God's word from Exodus chapter 3, let's first turn to our God and our Father in prayer, asking for his help.

Our God and our Father, we thank you that you are the one true God. You are King of kings, you are Lord of lords. And this morning, as we look to see what it means to know that you are holy, Lord, would you expand our understanding of you?

Help us to see you in truth, to worship you in truth, to know who you really are. And may this knowledge be something that doesn't just satisfy our academic curiosities.

Lord God, may this be life-transforming, changing knowledge of you. That causes us to know you, to love you. That transforms our lives.

Lord God, would you reshape us and remake us this morning. Guide me, hold me back from words that I say that may be harmful and false. Guide me in saying what is right and true this morning.

[1:17] By the power of your spirit. Amen. Okay. Well, this past summer, I hiked the Chief a number of times.

And there's one in particular I wish I could do over. This particular hike, a couple of you were there for it. I was in the middle of a season.

This would have been about August or so. I was in the middle of a season of car shopping. And I remember that once I reached the summit of the Chief, I was at the top there on my phone, sending emails, making phone calls to try to sort out my car shopping plans for the next day.

And even as I was in the middle of that pluri of activity, I remember thinking, you know, this doesn't seem right. This really isn't the place to be doing this sort of thing.

Who knows? Maybe I was really annoying the friends I was with there, too. I don't know. Derek says no. Are you sure? Is he just being polite or is he telling the truth? Who knows? All right.

[2:16] So I guess I wasn't being that much of a nuisance, right? So that's good. That's good news anyway. But at the same time, it didn't feel like that was the appropriate, you know, I got done with it. And I was like, you know, is this really the appropriate place for this?

I'm up on top of the Chief, all this incredible majesty and grandeur, this breathtaking scenery spread out before me. And I'm sending out emails. And I'm calling like, you know, hey, maybe I can run down to Vancouver the next day and go and take a look at your car.

And it just seemed wrong. It felt almost like I was profaning this place and profaning this moment. With my emails, with my phone calls about this ordinary business of life.

And this week, I've heard a few stories this week from folks about encounters with a place, a time, an object, a person that seemed somehow set apart, seemed somehow sacred.

And from the stories I've heard, there's just been some things that are there that those stories have in common. One common experience is simply somebody being out in the middle of nowhere, alone in an unfamiliar but incredibly beautiful place.

[3 : 26] A place that made this person feel really small, lose themselves in the grandeur of what they're experiencing. On the other hand, some of these stories have been about people who are in a fairly busy and familiar place.

A seemingly ordinary place, but a place that held special significance to them because that's where God had rescued them. That's where God had delivered them from a hopeless and a futile life. And being in that place would cause them, would take their breath away.

It would feel unusual. It would feel sacred. Now, have you ever been in that situation? Have you been in a place like that? Ever been in a place that took your breath away? Or have you ever approached, there's some sort of object that you felt that, you know, you almost couldn't even bear to touch?

It has such history, such significance to it. Have you ever experienced a moment in time that felt sacred, that brought you to silence? Or have you ever met a person who just seemed so full of gravity, so full of significance, that you almost couldn't even bear to look them in the eyes?

Now, as human beings, we've been created by God, and our Creator has given us the ability to sense that there's some places, there's some situations, there's some people that are set apart. We have a sense of the solemn, a sense of the sacred, and even more, a sense of the holy.

[4 : 50] We sense, we feel it when we encounter a time, a place, a thing, or a person of unusual significance. And at the beginning of our worship service, we read about a vision experienced by the prophet Isaiah hundreds of years after Israel's exodus out of the land of Egypt.

And in Isaiah's vision, Isaiah was standing in a holy place. He was standing in the temple of God in Jerusalem. That was a scary moment for him because the King Uzziah had been in that exact situation years earlier, and he'd been struck with leprosy because he didn't belong there.

He was not holy. And Isaiah knows he's in big trouble in this vision, being in such a holy place. And there Isaiah not only is in a holy place, but he encounters a holy person.

He encounters the Lord God himself, and around him, surrounding the Lord, are several fiery six-winged beings, the seraphim, creatures of immense glory, immense power, that would absolutely dazzle you and me, in and of themselves.

They'd make you lose your lunch. But these seraphim were, they were using their wings to cover their feet, shield their faces, because there was someone else there with even greater glory that they couldn't bear to look at.

[6 : 23] And Isaiah heard one of the seraphim shouting to one another, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of his glory.

The Lord of hosts, the Lord who commands the armies of heaven. He was appearing before Isaiah, and Isaiah's response, Woe is me, for I am lost.

Other translations may say, I am ruined, or I am 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.

This God, this Lord of hosts, that is the God that centuries earlier, Moses encountered. In the desert. And at that time, the people of Israel, they had spent hundreds of years of slavery in the land of Egypt, as we've learned over the last couple weeks.

And one of the Israelites, a man named Moses, we've seen his story, how he grew up in the household of Pharaoh, how he grew up in the king of Egypt's house, he grew up in royalty. But he knew that he was a descendant of the Israelites who were in slavery in the land of Egypt.

[7 : 41] And so, he tried to secretly make efforts to rescue his fellow Israelites, to get a revolution going. But instead, Moses failed, and he was exiled out into the desert. And he lived among a foreign nation, the people of Midian, a nomad, a man without a country, a man who pretty much had to abandon any future, and abandon any hope for his people.

But the Lord, the God of Israel, had not abandoned his people. And in Exodus 3, Exodus chapter 3, we're going to see the Lord begin to intervene.

And so, the Lord begins with Moses. He intervenes first with Moses, with a powerful, fiery vision of his holiness. Why don't you take your Bibles out, and if you haven't already, turn with me to Exodus chapter 3, verses 1 through 10.

Now, if you're using one of the Bibles that our ushers handed out, you'll find this on page 46. Page 46, Exodus chapter 3, verses 1 through 10. Let me read these words for you.

Now, Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian. And he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.

[9 : 09] And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed.

And Moses said, I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned. when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see.

God called to him out of the bush, Moses, Moses. And he said, here I am. Then he said, do not come near.

Take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground. And he said, I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.

And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. Then the Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters.

[10 : 19] I know their sufferings. And I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppressed them. Come, I will send you to Pharaoh, that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.

This is the word of the Lord. So after 400 years of silence, God is once again speaking to his people. God is speaking in particular to Moses.

Now Moses, it would appear, based on his reaction, he's heard of this God, God. He seems to know that his ancestors, his father, his father, and then his ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, he seems to know they have a history with this God.

He may know that God has a covenant with them to give them many descendants, to give them a promised land, that the whole world will be blessed through them.

[11 : 39] Maybe he knows that. But regardless, this God seems distant and far away. Moses has never encountered God for himself.

And so in this first meeting, the very first impression that Moses has of this God is going to be the impression that is formed by God's first words to him. After basically calling Moses over, God says in verse 5, do not come near.

Take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground. So God is present in a unique way.

Certainly God is present everywhere in the universe. He is a spirit. But there is a, he is present in a unique way in this burning bush. And because of his presence there, his appearance to Moses there, the ground that now surrounds the bush has become holy.

Why? Because God himself is holy. So we learn here first that the Lord is a holy God.

[12 : 51] The Lord is a holy God. Now, that word holy, that's, think about the ways that you hear that used outside of church.

I don't know that I ever use, hear it used honestly, ever hear it used in a straightforward manner outside of church. Because we understand that the word holy means morally proper or pure.

But outside of religious discussions, it's almost always used in sort of a scoffing manner, right? Someone who acts as though they're morally better and superior than other people. What do we say about that person? They have a holier than thou attitude.

A holier than thou attitude. A holier than thou attitude. And yet, if holiness, all it just means is this sort of morally proper, morally pure thing, it's very odd that God would use the word holy to describe the ground.

I mean, unless a clump of dirt can somehow be morally pure, it just seems like our understanding of holiness may be inadequate if that's all that we think holiness is.

[14 : 03] So, let's learn about holiness a little bit more. Now, I could just talk with you about what holiness is, but about a year ago I found a video that I think does such a good job of explaining holiness that I feel like I'm not going to bother to reinvent the wheel.

Let's just show you the video. So, we've got a six-minute video that's put together by the Bible Project, which just does a terrific series of videos on the Bible, on the books of the Bible, biblical themes.

And so, the Bible Project explains here what it means to be holy. So, I'm going to ask Rick if he'd be willing to play that for us. ...the holy presence was located. And at the center of the temple was this room called the most holy place.

It's the hot spot of God's presence. And whether you're an Israelite living in the land around the temple or a priest working right in the temple, you're in proximity to God's holy presence, which is dangerous.

Yeah, this is a problem. So, how's it supposed to work? Well, in the Bible, the solution is that you need to become pure. So, like being morally pure. Yeah, and that's easy enough to understand.

[15 : 07] But the Bible spends a lot of time talking about another kind of purity, being ritually pure, which is a state where you separate yourself from anything related to death, like touching things like diseased skin or dead bodies or even certain bodily fluids.

All these make you impure. And becoming ritually impure isn't necessarily sinful. What's wrong is waltzing into God's presence when you're in an impure state. And so, that's why God gave the Israelites very clear instructions for knowing when they were impure, steps to become pure, so that they could go into the temple again.

So, that's what the book of Leviticus is about. Right. But it doesn't stop there. This idea keeps developing. So, later in the scriptures, we find this really interesting story by a prophet named Isaiah.

And he has this crazy vision where he's in the temple and he's right in God's presence. He's totally terrified. Yeah, he knows the rules. He shouldn't even be in there. And he's worried about being destroyed.

And then this crazy creature called a seraphim. Yeah, that is a crazy creature. Totally. So, it flies over with a hot coal and then it sears Isaiah's lips with the coal and says something really weird.

[16 : 17] Your guilt is taken away and your sin is atoned for. So, this burning coal somehow makes Isaiah pure. Yeah, it's remarkable because normally if you touch something impure, it transfers its impurity to you.

But now here's this new idea where you have this coal, this very holy and pure object and it touches Isaiah and it transfers its purity to him. Isaiah is not destroyed by God's holiness.

He's transformed by it. I mean, the implications of this are just huge. But there's one more development. This time from another prophet, Ezekiel. And he has this vision where he's standing at the temple and he sees water trickling out from it.

And then that water turns into a stream and then it grows into a deep river that starts flowing through the desert leaving this trail of green trees behind it and then it flows into the dead sea making everything fresh and alive.

So, instead of becoming pure first and then going into the temple, here God's holiness comes out from the temple making things pure and bringing them to life. What does it all mean?

[17 : 20] So, we don't know until we meet this man, Jesus. And he claims that he's fulfilling all of these ancient visions but in surprising new ways. So, Jesus, he went around touching people who are impure.

People with skin diseases, a woman with chronic bleeding or dead people. And when he touches them, their impurity should transfer over to Jesus but instead Jesus' purity transfers to them and actually heals their bodies.

Jesus is like that holy coal in Isaiah's vision. Right. And Jesus claimed that he was the human embodiment of God's own holiness and that he and his followers were now God's temple so that through them God's holy presence would go out into the world and bring life and healing and hope.

And so, this is why Jesus described his followers as having streams of living water flowing out of them. So, this is our part of the story where we find ourselves now but where is this all heading?

So, the last pages of the Bible end with a final vision about God's holiness. This time, it's by a guy named John and in his vision we see the whole world made completely new.

[18 : 32] The entire earth has become God's temple and Ezekiel's river is there flowing out of God's presence immersing all of creation removing all impurity and bringing everything back to life.

Well, that's better than any visual aid I would be able to come up with. Dustin was joking that we could maybe set some of these bushes on fire here for a bit of a burning bush but I think I like that a little bit better.

So, what you and I, what we've learned here is that holiness it does include the concept of moral purity but it's really so much more because it's about who God is.

It's all about this unique, powerful, life-giving nature of God himself and Moses' encounter with a holy God it helps fill in some of the details about what it really means to be holy.

It helps correct some misconceptions, some misunderstandings of ours about what it means that the Lord is a holy God. One of the biggest misunderstandings that people tend to have about holiness is this, that they think that a holy person you know, as we said, holier than thou, they've got to be stuck up.

[19 : 46] A holy person is someone that's too good for the unwashed masses. All these impure and corrupt and sinful people like you and me. So, someone who is holy is viewed as not only unapproachable but unloving, cold, distant.

You can't really have a relationship with a holy person. You can't get to know a person like that. And like most false ideas, this one is built around a kernel of truth.

Because in Exodus chapter 3 verse 5, what does God tell Moses? The first thing he says is, do not come near. He tells Moses to keep his distance.

And Moses not only keeps his distance but in verse 6, he covers his face. So, if you were reading this story and you weren't really paying close attention, you might come away with the impression that this holy God is unapproachable and unknowable.

But if you look carefully at these verses, look carefully at the language used in verses 1 through 10, you'll notice there's one word that's appearing far more than any others.

[21 : 06] There's this one word that just keeps appearing over and over and over again just to an unusual degree. It's a word that's translated into English as see or look or appear.

So, in verse 2, the Lord appears to Moses who looks at him. In verse 3, Moses says, I will turn aside to see this great sight. In verse 4, the Lord sees that Moses has turned aside to see him.

Verse 6, Moses can't bear to look at God. And so, that sounds like, okay, now he's not seeing. It's actually a different word in the original language. We get back to the original word in verse 7. God says, he has surely seen the people of Israel.

And in verse 9, he says, he has seen their oppression. Now, whenever you've got a narrative in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament, and in that story there is this word that is just repeated a crazy number of times like that, that should make you stop and think, hmm, why would the author include this word over and over and over and over again?

I think they're trying to bang a point into my head. In this case, the emphasis here, not only does God see his people, but God causes himself to be seen.

[22 : 23] In other words, we learn in verses 1-6 that the Lord is a holy God who reveals his nature. The Lord is a holy God who reveals his nature.

So this is a bit of a paradox. Two things that seem to contradict each other but are in fact both true. On the one hand, we've got this holy God and to be holy, that means that he is fearsome, he is dangerous to approach because he is so good, he is so holy.

And on the other hand, this holy God approaches us and he reveals himself to us because God didn't have to, he doesn't have to appear to Moses, he doesn't have to tell Moses about himself.

He chooses to do so. The Lord chooses to have a real, genuine relationship with Moses and with his people.

people. And so he is a God, the Lord is a God whom you and I, we cannot approach him and yet he approaches us, he moves towards us in love and he does this not in spite of his holiness but because of his holiness.

[23 : 44] A holy God is a God that moves toward people and makes himself known to them. the Lord is a holy God who reveals his nature.

And there's even more because God not only makes himself known to his people, he himself also knows his people. And it's true that God does know, God does see everything that happens as theologians might say, he is omniscient, he is all-knowing.

But there is, there's a special way in which God knows his own people.

Because, first of all, there's public figures that I would say I know a lot of facts about, I know a lot of facts about certain public figures that are in the news, but I will never know them. Not the way that I know many of you.

Not the way that I have a special relationship and a special concern. And a personal knowledge of you. And in the same way, God knows his own people in a special way.

[24 : 55] And so in verse 7, when God says, I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and I've heard their cry because of their taskmasters, I know their sufferings.

The Lord is, he's saying more than that, you know, I possess information pertaining to these events. You know, he's not just saying that. He's saying that he has a real relationship, a real concern, a real love for these people.

He formed a covenant with our ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, a loyal relationship bound by a vow. And a holy God is not going to remain silent forever while his people are suffering.

When the time is right, he is going to rise up and rescue them. The Lord is a holy God who reveals his nature and rescues his people.

The Lord is a holy God who reveals his nature and rescues his people. And this is what God tells Moses in verse 8. I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land.

[26 : 13] A land flowing with milk and honey. So God, he doesn't just want to pull his people out of their slavery, out of their suffering. He doesn't want to just come out like, okay, your suffering is over, now you're on your own.

You know, problem solved. God wants to bring them into the best life they could have. He wants to bring them to life in the land where he is present with them, where he is blessing them.

He wants to experience what truly is the good life in the promised land. He wants them to be holy as he is holy. He wants them to be a holy people in the presence of a holy God.

Because God not only is holy, but God wants to extend his holiness out to you and me and from you and me out into the world. God is so that as the seraphim said in Isaiah 6, so that the whole earth is full of his glory.

And so the Lord is a holy God who reveals his nature and rescues his people. And then as if that revelation isn't remarkable enough, Moses is about to get a bit of a rude surprise.

[27 : 30] Big plot twist coming up because he's going to be astonished to find that this holy God is not going to be working, just doing everything on his own with no human involvement whatsoever.

God is not going to be working independently of his people. Instead, what he's going to do is he's going to extend his revealing, rescuing holiness into the world.

And he's going to do it through his people. And he's got one particular person in mind. Verse 9, God begins explaining how he's going to rescue the Israelites. So he says, All right, all well and good.

And then Moses gets a heart attack with these next words. Come, I will send you to Pharaoh, that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.

So Moses, you know that land where you murdered that guy and the king of Egypt wanted you killed and you ran away for your life and you're living in exile for the last 40 years?

[28 : 40] You're going back. This is how God accomplishes his purposes all throughout scripture. There's this consistent pattern throughout scripture where God reveals himself through human beings who encounter him, through human beings who report his words.

I mean, that's how we have our Bible today. Moses himself is the one who has reported these words to us. The authors of scripture write the words of the Holy Spirit.

And they're not just, in most cases, they're not just dictating words spoken by the Holy Spirit. They're writing in their own words, in their own ways. But they are guided by the Holy Spirit to speak all truth. God uses human beings to accomplish his purposes, to extend his holiness and his glory throughout the world.

And God not only reveals himself through human beings, God rescues his people through human beings that he has chosen as his savior.

And so in this case, God has chosen Moses to be the savior of his people, the children of Israel. God will rescue his people by the hand of Moses. So the Lord is a holy God who reveals his nature and rescues his people through his chosen savior.

[30 : 03] The Lord is a holy God who reveals his nature and rescues his people through his chosen savior. This is a consistent pattern throughout the history of his people, the history written down in the Bible.

The holy God has appointed people, you know, just ordinary people, people like you and me. And he uses them as rescuers. People like Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Gideon, Samson, Ruth and Boaz, Samuel, David.

And all of these saviors, saviors with a lowercase s, they all direct our eyes to look toward a coming savior, one true savior with a capital S, the savior of all, Jesus of Nazareth.

He is God's chosen savior, his Messiah, the Christ. And the holy God reveals his nature through Jesus Christ. In John chapter 1, we read, 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. For the law was given through Moses.

[31 : 33] Something better, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. The only God who is at the father's side, he has made him known.

You want to know what God is like? You look at what Jesus Christ is like. Because when you see Jesus, you see the glory of God.

God reveals his holy nature through Jesus Christ. And it is only through Jesus Christ that anyone knows who God is. There is no other name under heaven by which you and I can be saved.

He is the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the father except through Jesus. It is only through God the son that we come to know God the father. And the holy God not only reveals his nature through his chosen savior, he also rescues his people through his chosen savior, Jesus Christ.

In John chapter 12, Jesus, the son of man, he tells his disciples how God will rescue him. He's talking about himself and he says in John chapter 12, the hour has come for the son of man to be glorified.

[32 : 54] Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone. But if it dies, it bears much fruit. So what Jesus is saying is that by choosing to die on behalf of his followers, on behalf of his disciples, he is going to give them life.

his death is going to bear fruit like a seed that falls into the ground and up sprouts a fruit-bearing plant.

And this is how the whole earth is going to be filled with the glory of the Lord. Jesus Christ is going to go willingly to the cross. He's going to be crucified.

He is going to be killed. He's going to be buried. And then he is going to be raised to new life, raised to eternal life, that good life in the presence of God, his Father.

And so Jesus tells you and me in John chapter 12, whoever loves his life loses it. And whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

[34 : 11] If anyone serves me, he must follow me. And where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.

So through Jesus Christ, what God is urging you, what God is urging me, is this. Embrace eternal life. Embrace that good life.

Turn from your old way of life. Turn from your sinful habits that harm, that corrupt you and everyone around you.

Turn from the self-important, self-indulgent manner of life that the world around you encourages, trains you to follow. Believe in Jesus Christ.

Embrace the cross on which he suffered. Love him and his people. Come to know him. And you will know the holy God. Come to believe him. And he will be rescued by the holy God.

[35 : 16] Because he has sent his son to make you and me holy just as he is holy. The Lord is a holy God who reveals his nature and rescues his people through his chosen Savior.

Let's pray. Oh God, our Father, you are a holy God. There is so much that we could say about you.

No matter what we say, our words will fall short. about how good you are, how loving and life-giving you are, how powerful you are, how fearsome you are.

You are a threat to the way of life of people who do not want you here, who want to remain in sin. Lord God, we know that you want what is best for each of us.

you want what is best for your world. Forgive us for being resistant to your goodness. May your glory fill the whole earth as the waters fill the sea.

[36 : 32] May the whole earth know you and know that you are God, the God who saves. Amen. Amen.