

“For the LORD Our God is Holy – Part 1”
Psalm 99
(Preached at Trinity, March 4, 2012)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. “The LORD reigns.” There are few who understand the magnitude of this declaration. Most find it easy and convenient to simply dismiss it. They don’t understand that every nanosecond of their lives is under God’s sovereign rule. Every beat of their heart is ordered by God. They exist by God’s command. Every molecule in the universe is under God’s dominion. The best statement of God’s Kingly rule is found in **Psalm 115:3** – “But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases.”
2. We’ve seen this theme many times over the last several weeks. **Psalm 99** is a part of what are known as the Royal Psalms – Psalms 93-100. It begins with “The LORD reigneth,” which it shares in common with Psalm 93 & 97.
3. Although each of these Royal psalms exalts some aspect of God’s sovereign reign over His creation and **Psalm 99** maintains this theme, it also has another theme that overshadows everything else. Three times the psalmist declares, God is holy – **Verses 3, 5, 9**. Spurgeon said this could be called the Holy, Holy, Holy psalm. This compares with the visions of both Isaiah and the Apostle John:
Isaiah 6:3 KJV - “And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.”
Revelation 4:8 KJV - “And the four beasts had each of them six wings about *him*; and *they were* full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.”
4. Of all of God’s attributes His holiness shines with particular brilliance.
Exodus 15:11 KJV - “Who *is* like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods? who *is* like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful *in* praises, doing wonders?”
Stephen Charnock: “When we take a picture of a man, we draw the most beautiful part, the face, which is a member of the greatest excellency. When God would be drawn to the life, as much as can be, in the spirit of His creatures, He is drawn in this attribute, as being the most beautiful perfection of God, and most valuable with Him. Power is his hand and arm; omniscience, His eye; mercy, His bowels; eternity, His duration; His holiness is His beauty.”
5. Remember, as we consider the holiness of God there are two basic meanings.
 - a. First of all, it refers to God’s otherness.
Psalm 99:2 KJV - “he *is* high above all the people.”
 - (1) He is apart, separate, distinct—He is holy other. He dwells in absolute majesty and glory that nothing imperfect shall ever look upon.
John 1:18 KJV - “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared *him*.”

- (2) God's holiness refers to His divine, transcendent nature. God alone is infinite, eternal, immutable, self-existent. God alone had no beginning.
Isaiah 40:18 KJV - "To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him?"
- (3) In this sense, the holiness of God cannot be possessed by any creature.
- b. In the second sense, it refers to God's purity, His moral perfection.
 God rules with perfection.
Verse 4 - "thou executest judgment and righteousness in Jacob."
 God is wholly perfect. He is without error, without sin. He never makes a mistake or a misjudgment. He is flawless. In this sense holiness is a communicable attribute. We are commanded to conform to this moral perfection.
Leviticus 20:7 KJV - "Sanctify yourselves therefore, and be ye holy: for I *am* the LORD your God."
1 Peter 1:15-16 KJV - "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; ¹⁶ Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy."
5. This psalm delves deeply into the holiness of God.
 As with many of the Psalms, trying to outline **Psalms 99** proves a difficult challenge.
- A. Since God is declared to be holy three times in the psalm it is tempting to divide it along those lines. Many have taken this approach in various ways.
- B. It seems more natural to simply divide it into two parts. This was the approach of Derek Kidner.
- I. **Verses 1-5** – Holiness Enthroned
- II. **Verses 6-9** – Holiness Encountered
- I. **Verses 1-5** – Holiness Enthroned
- A. **Psalms 99** begins with a vision into the throne room of God
Verse 1 - "The LORD reigneth . . . he sitteth *between* the cherubims"
Verse 3 - "*for* it is holy." Better translation: "He is holy"
Verse 5 - "He *is* holy."
1. The psalmist describes the throne of God as "sitting between the cherubims"
- a. This is an obvious reference to the Holy of Holies – the Ark of the Covenant had two cherubims on the lid with their wings extending and touching at the center. This was called the mercy seat and the place where God's presence was made manifest to Israel. It was considered the dwelling place of God.
 The expression "between the cherubims" became an expression of God's presence.
2 Kings 19:15 - "And Hezekiah prayed before the LORD, and said, O LORD God of Israel, which dwellest *between* the cherubims, thou art the God, *even* thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; thou hast made heaven and earth."
- b. In addition, the Ark was placed between the wings of two great cherubim in the Temple.

- c. The cherubim are heavenly angels assigned with the particular function of manifesting the holiness of God. They are powerful and express the fury of divine judgment.
We find cherubims at the entrance of the Garden of Eden waving a flaming sword.
- d. They made a fitting display upon the Ark of the Covenant declaring the judgment and holiness of God – a God who will only be approached by mercy and atonement. This mercy seat today is now that throne of grace sprinkled with the atoning blood of Christ.
2. Isaiah was granted a peek at the holy throne of God
Isaiah 6:1-3 KJV - "In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. ² Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. ³ And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory."
- a. Isaiah was given this vision "in the year that king Uzziah died." Israel had been given a devastating blow. Uzziah had been their king for 52 years. For many this was the only king they had ever known. But their king was dead.
In Isaiah's vision he saw God seated. While their earthly king was dead the King of kings was alive and reigning.
- b. As Isaiah viewed the throne room the seraphim declared God's infinite holiness. The Hebrew language uses repetition to give an emphatic dimension to a statement.
For example in Genesis 2:17 we read in the English
Genesis 2:17 NAS - "for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die."
The Hebrew reads: מוֹת תָּמוּת
Literally it would read, "dying you will die."
- c. For these seraphim to give the thrice declaration holy, holy, holy declares God to be of the highest holiness. He is the holiest being in the universe. God is holy, holier, holiest.
3. Isaiah's view of the holiness of God caused him to tremble
Isaiah 6:5 KJV - "Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I *am* a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts."
Why did Isaiah tremble? Because He saw God's wrath. The doors rattled and the throne room was filled with smoke.
Isaiah 6:4 KJV - "And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke."

4. When God appeared to Israel on Mount Sinai it was a fearful display of God's holiness
Exodus 19:18-21 NAU - "Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently. ¹⁹ When the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him with thunder. ²⁰ The LORD came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain; and the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. ²¹ Then the LORD spoke to Moses, "Go down, warn the people, so that they do not break through to the LORD to gaze, and many of them perish."
5. When David had the Ark of the Covenant moved from Obed-Edom it was an occasion of celebration. They loaded the Ark on a cart and proceeded to make the journey. At some point the oxen came upon rough ground. The oxen stumbled and the cart began to shake and the Ark was in danger of tumbling to the ground. Uzza, who was walking along side, reached up to steady the Ark and when he touched it God killed him. He failed to recognize the absolute holiness of God and foolishly thought his hand was cleaner than the ground.
6. When Daniel saw a vision of the person of Christ he trembled and fell upon his hands and knees.
Daniel 10:6-10 KJV - "His body also was like the beryl, and his face as the appearance of lightning, and his eyes as lamps of fire, and his arms and his feet like in colour to polished brass, and the voice of his words like the voice of a multitude. ⁷ And I Daniel alone saw the vision: for the men that were with me saw not the vision; but a great quaking fell upon them, so that they fled to hide themselves. ⁸ Therefore I was left alone, and saw this great vision, and there remained no strength in me: for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength. Yet heard I the voice of his words: and when I heard the voice of his words, then was I in a deep sleep on my face, and my face toward the ground. ¹⁰ And, behold, an hand touched me, which set me upon my knees and *upon* the palms of my hands."
7. I could read to you of Paul or the Apostle John, or anyone else who stood in the presence of God. The only possible reaction is that of holy fear and reverence – of trembling.

B. This is the reaction of the psalmist

Verse 1 - "let the people tremble . . . let the earth be moved."

1. All of creation should bow beneath the holy throne of God. It is particularly wicked that most of humanity refuses to bow.
2. David described this holy majesty well in **Psalm 18**
See Verses 6-13

- C. God is infinitely above His creation
1. "he *is* high above all the people."
 God cannot be any higher, and we cannot bow any lower
 Louis the XIV ascended the throne of France in 1638 at the age of 4 and reigned for 72 years. He became consumed with his power and called himself the "Great Monarch. When he died he was placed in a solid gold coffin with a single candle burning to symbolize his greatness. Multitudes attended his funeral.
 Bishop Massillon presided over the funeral and when he rose he bent down from the pulpit and blew out the candle. The entire cathedral gasped. In the darkness the bishop declared, "Only God is great!"
 2. God alone is worthy of all praise and honor and worship
Verse 3- "Let them praise thy great and terrible name; *for it is holy.*"
 - a. Remember, in the Hebrew mind a person's name reflected his character. It truly defined his essence.
 - b. The Psalmist describes God's name as "terrible." This means full of all reverence and awe. Most translations translate it "awesome." The Hebrew word is most often translated "fear"
 3. There are many who profess to know and worship God – as long as He is a small God, as long as He is a tame God.
 There are few who will bow before His absolute majesty. They despise His demands of absolute holiness. They despise the true nature of who He is.
Hebrews 12:28-29 KJV - "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: ²⁹ For our God *is* a consuming fire."
 4. There is only one way we can approach the throne of God: Through Christ. And then only with lowly submission, humble contrition, and reverential awe.

Conclusion:

1. Has the church today lost this sense of awe?
 - A. How do you enter into this sanctuary as you come to worship? Do you give any consideration of what is taking place?
 - B. How do you prepare to come? Do you consider your sin before entering into His presence? Are you convicted?
 - C. Do the words of Psalm 2 describe how you live before God?
 "Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling."
 - D. Look at **Verse 5** – "Exalt ye the LORD our God, and worship at his footstool; *for he is holy.*"
2. May **Psalm 99** give us a fresh appreciation for the holiness of God and may it lead us to come before Him with holy reverence and Godly fear.