

THE HOLINESS OF GOD

Revelation 15

I often feel overwhelmed when speaking about the nature of God. I am sure that if I had been caught up into the third heaven that I still wouldn't be able to do justice to these great themes that we have been considering together. And I feel especially inadequate when it comes to the subject this morning, the holiness of God. John Howe one of the Puritans, who lived in the ^{1600's} ~~16 hundreds~~, called the holiness of God "the attribute of attributes". Those of you who have read James Packer's book, Knowing God know that he does not have a chapter on the holiness of God because he considers, as do many others, that holiness is the very essence of God's nature. Holiness is what He is. The psalmist says in Psalm 111:9, "Holy and reverent is his name." No term that is used in Scripture could possibly be more descriptive of what God is. Psalm 99 could probably be called the Psalm of the holiness of God. In verse 3 of that Psalm you read, "Let them praise thy great and terrible name for it is holy." In verse 5 of that same Psalm, "Exalt ye the Lord our God and worship at his footstool for he is holy." And then the last verse, the 9th verse says, "Exalt the Lord our God and worship at his holy hill for the Lord our God is holy." From our Scripture reading this morning in the 4th verse as Gary mentioned we have the statement, "Who shall not fear thee oh Lord and glorify thy name for thou only art holy and all nations shall come and worship before thee for thy judgements are made manifest." So as we take up this subject this morning I want as my first point simply to state that the Lord is holy.

What does this mean? Referring to some of the incommunicable attributes of God, that is those attributes which God has by Himself and does not share with us, one writer has said, "He only is independently, infinitely, immutably holy. He is so because He is the sum of all moral excellence. He is absolute purity, unsullied even by the shadow of sin." The Apostle John expressed it in words which most of you know very well when he said, "God is light and in him is no darkness at all." The Old Testament prophet Habakuk expressed practically the same things

although he used different words when he said, "Art thou not from everlasting O Lord, my God, mine holy One, thou art of pure eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity." And so when we say that God is holy, we mean that He is completely without sin, that He is incapable of sinning and furthermore that He cannot and will not ultimately tolerate sin. Psalm 7:11 says that "God is angry with the wicked every day" even though He may not express the anger in the things that He does from day to day. So God is holy, infinitely holy, absolutely holy. He has never been anything but holy. And He never will be anything but holy. His name is holy. And we are to worship Him as the holy God. But our text says something else. If you will notice it carefully, it says, and this is taken from the worship of the saints of the tribulation, "Thou only art holy." Now this is one of God's communicable attributes. No man is holy like God is. No angel is holy like God is. There are holy men and holy women just as there are holy angels. But none are as holy as He is. And this applies equally to the Father, to the Son and to the Holy Spirit who is called over and over again in Scripture, the Holy Spirit. What the singing saints of Revelation said is absolutely true that God only is holy in the sense that He is holy, perfectly holy, eternally holy, incapable of being anything but absolutely holy. You will notice in our text this morning that in verse 3 of this chapter it is said that they "sing the song of Moses, the servant of God and the song of the Lamb." And the song of Moses seems to be a reference to the song that Moses led the children of Israel in singing when they came across the Red Sea and you remember the waters of the Red Sea closed in over the Egyptian army and they watched as the bodies of the Egyptian soldiers were washed upon the shore. But as Moses led that great choir in what is actually the first Psalm of Scripture, one verse out of that Psalm sounds this key note not only of the holiness of God but that He alone is holy in the sense that He is and the words go like this: "Who is like unto thee O Lord among the gods. Who is like thee? Glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders." Now I don't know how it happened but I do know that as the children of Israel saw that great work which God did in destroying their

enemies they were impressed most of all with the fact that God was glorious in holiness and that there was none who could compare with Him. The Apostle Paul emphasizes this in the last chapter of First Timothy when he is speaking about Christ and he says this, "Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto, whom no man has seen nor can see, to whom be honour and power everlasting, Amen." Now he evidently means in this passage that no one has ever seen that light of glory and holiness which belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ, that glory was laid aside. It was seen momentarily on the Mount of Transfiguration. But He is the only One Who has immortality dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto. But there is a third thing that I would like for us to see from the Scriptures and that is not only is God holy and He is the only One Who is holy but all that He does is holy. And this is of tremendous importance from a practical standpoint when you and I think of God's dealings with us. Here are the saints out of the tribulation and they are singing the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb. They are ascribing glory and honor and praise to God for all that He has done and you see here as you do in other passages of the book of the Revelation that having gone through great difficulty, great tribulation, having suffered to the point of laying down their lives for the sake of the Gospel, nevertheless as they lift their hearts in praise and worship to God they say, "Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty, just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints." So that God's works are consistent with what He is. He cannot do anything that is unholy. He cannot do anything that is sinful. He cannot do anything that in the least is a departure from His own nature. Psalm 98:1 says, "O sing unto the Lord a new song for he hath done marvelous things, his right hand and his holy arm hath gotten him the victory." So that God is incapable of doing anything but that which is characterized by His holiness.

Now having seen all of this I want, if the Lord will enable me to do so this morning, to point out from Scripture some of the consequences of the holiness of God. Now I

don't have time this morning to deal with all of them. Dealing with the holiness of God is like dealing with all of the Bible in one message. And so I have to be selective and I trust that you will understand this but perhaps in just these brief glimpses that we are getting into the attributes of God it will be an encouragement for you to go on in your reading and to search out these truths and to not only learn what they are to a greater extent but to see how these truths are to affect our lives. Now many times we don't have to be told the affect because we realize the affect when the truth itself comes upon us. But let me mention some of these this morning. And as you and I look at these consequences of the holiness of God I trust that the Lord will use each one of these in our lives as He sees that we need them.

Now the first one that I want to mention and I am just going to deal with four of these consequences this morning, but the first one is mentioned in our text, the fourth verse of the 15th chapter of the book of the Revelation and it indicates that because of the holiness of God men should fear Him. Now I want to speak of this especially this morning to those of you who do not know the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior. I realize that the word fear is used in the Bible in different ways. Fear is used in connection with a believers relationship to God. We fear the Lord because He is God and we are creatures. We fear the Lord because He is sovereign, He is omnipotent. He is over all things. We are utterly helpless in His hands. There is a sense as far as believers are concerned which is brought out in the Scriptures that we should refrain from doing things that are unholy because we fear the Lord and because of the wrath of Almighty God. But if I were to ask and answer the question this morning, why should a person receive the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, I realize that many times when we preach the Gospel and when we witness personally to people we ask them to receive Christ without really giving them any reason as to why they should receive the Lord Jesus Christ. You know the best answer to that question, why should I receive Christ as my personal Savior would be because God is a holy God.

Now if you do not turn to the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior now, you are going to face the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit someday in the future in judgement. And it's going to be too late to think about salvation when that time comes. Solomon once wrote and you find it in the Proverbs in the 9th chapter, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and the knowledge of the holy is understanding." So that regardless of all of the things that you may have to do, all of the priorities that you might have in your life, there isn't anything that should take precedence over your relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior. The reason that people do not pay attention to Christ is because they do not know or if they know it, they have never fully come to understand what it means that God is holy. Jesus Christ is not just one way of escaping the wrath of a holy God, He is the only way. And not until you and I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ can we know that our sins are forgiven. The Apostle Paul in First Timothy 1:15 says, "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." The writer of the book of Hebrews says that "Christ has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." And even in the passage that we considered together 2-3 Sundays ago from Acts 17, Paul in preaching to the Athenians says that "God now commands all men everywhere to repent because he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained where he hath given assurance unto all men in that he hath raised him from the dead." You see the counterpart of the holiness of God is the wrath of God. And you would never have the doctrine of the wrath of God in Scripture, you would never have the doctrine of eternal punishment, you would never have the doctrine of eternal hell and suffering throughout all eternity if you did not have the corresponding doctrine of the holiness of God. And once you understand or begin to understand as we can what the holiness of God means then you are not going to have any argument with the fact that men are going to suffer eternally if they go into eternity without the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior. The most foolish thing that a person can do is to delay coming to Christ or to refuse the offer of salvation that is to be found in the Lord

Jesus Christ alone. The holy God is a God to be feared. And let me say this morning from the depths of my own heart that if you do not know the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Savior you are under the wrath of God. And the only means by which a holy God can be satisfied concerning the sins of men is through what His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ did when He died on the cross. And I trust that if you are here this morning and you don't know the Lord as your personal Savior that right at this very moment before the service is even concluded you will open your heart and trust Him as your Savior.

Let me mention the second consequence. You can see it in what is taking place here in our text in Revelation chapter 17 in the singing of the saints. And that is we should worship Him. This is what the saints are doing. And they say in their song in Revelation 15 that "all nations shall come and worship before thee." During the time that Bill Wecks is on vacation I have the privilege of teaching his class and we are looking at the first chapter of the book of the Revelation this morning in the class. And as I looked at that passage and you remember John was given a very special vision of the Lord Jesus Christ, he had never seen the Lord Jesus as far as we know the way he was Him as it is described there in Revelation 1. John saw Him on the Mount of Transfiguration but nothing to indicate that it was like this. John saw Him of course all through His earthly ministry, but John saw Him in a very special way and there was the manifestation of His glory as the Lord Jesus Christ appeared to John on the Isle of Patmos and you remember the reaction of John and this is the reason I say that when you and I begin to understand these things it seems that we do what we should do without being told that we need to do it because we recognize in the depths of our hearts that these things ought to be done. And John Himself tells us, "When I saw him I fell at his feet as dead." And there wasn't any talking on John's part, but the Lord Jesus Christ then ministered to John and said, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, I am he that liveth and was dead and behold I am alive forevermore."

But you see when John sensed something of the majesty, the glory, the holiness of the Lord Jesus Christ as he had never seen it before, nobody had to tell him, "John fall on your face and be quiet." John did it because he knew that that was the only place for him to be when the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ was manifested as it was. No wonder these saints say that the day is coming when "all nations shall come and worship before him." This must be what the Apostle Paul was speaking of or writing about when he wrote concerning the Lord Jesus Christ and you remember he says, "Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God but emptied himself, made himself of no reputation," so that when He walked the streets of this world and people saw Him, why they took Him as just a mere human being. We know His father, we know His mother, we know His brothers, we know His sisters. His glory was veiled. But the Apostle Paul tells us that the day is coming, "God has highly exalted him and given him a name that is above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father." Now I don't believe that Paul was indicating by that passage that everybody is going to be saved. I don't believe that he indicates that those who bow before the Lord and express their homage to Him will necessarily be redeemed. The redeemed of course will be there. But men universally will recognize the holiness of Jesus Christ and pay homage to Him and the One Whose name is above every name. But you see this is a truth that is especially appropriate as far as the people of God are concerned. How many times have you quoted Psalm 103:1 without actually recognizing what the psalmist was saying. The psalmist says, "Bless the Lord O my soul and all that is within me bless his holy name." The psalmist in Psalm 105 says "My mouth shall speak of the praise of the Lord and let all flesh bless his holy name forever and ever." Isaiah was one of those servants of the Lord who was given the privilege in Old Testament times of looking into heaven and seeing what was taking place and you remember as he writes in Isaiah 6, he tells us that he saw angels and the angels who were seraphim were worshipping God and one was crying to another and do you remember

what they were saying, they were saying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory." So that whether it is angels in heaven or men on earth or the redeemed after they have been taken into the presence of the Lord, the holiness of God is that which produces worship in the hearts of His people and if you are concerned this morning because you know so little about worship and when you get on your knees instead of just being lost in wonder, love and praise as the hymn indicates, you find yourself immediately presenting your requests to the Lord, you don't know much about worship, let me encourage you this morning to take your Bibles and look at those passages that deal with the holiness of God and as you understand more of the absolute perfection, the eternal purity of the Lord Jesus Christ I am sure that you won't be able to feed your soul on those truths without finding that you too are prostrating yourself in the very presence of the Lord for the purpose of worshipping Him in absolute silence because you can't find the words that are adequate to express your adoration of Him. If we know the holiness of God we are going to be worshippers of God.

But there is a third consequence. Will you turn to the 22nd Psalm for just a few moments, Psalm 22. Gary spoke on these 22 and 23rd Psalms not too long ago and I trust that this truth will be fresh in your memory. It is a classic illustration of how the holiness of God encourages our faith and perhaps one reason that our faith is so faltering is because we know so little about God's holiness. This is a classic illustration because you can tell immediately from the first words of Psalm 22 that this is a Messianic Psalm. Now that means that this is a Psalm that is prophetic of Christ. And most boys and girls who read the Bible know that when the Lord Jesus died on the cross, just prior to His death one of the seven things that He said was, "My God, my God why hast thou forsaken me." So this is a classic illustration because the Lord Jesus is involved. But if you look at the heading of this Psalm you will also see that this is a Psalm of David. So it means that David was involved. And

that David was not just speaking prophetically of the fact that the Messiah was going to be forsaken by God or apparently forsaken by God but he was giving expression as the Psalm clearly shows to his own feeling of desertion by God. And David, this man after God's heart, this man who knew the Lord as few men know Him, David an Old Testament saint walked for most of his life on higher ground than most New Testament saints walked on. He knew the Lord more intimately, was more devoted to the Lord. And yet David has those times in his life when it seemed that God had gone away, God was leaving him to either his enemies or to impersonal circumstances and to his difficulties and so there probably were many times that David cried out in agony of his soul, "My God, my God why hast thou forsaken me?" But it is a classic illustration not because it includes the Lord Jesus and includes David but I am sure this morning, just as sure as I am standing before you that this includes many of you who are listening to my voice. I can assure you that there have been times in my life when I have cried out like this. In fact that is when I really discovered the meaning of this passage. When it seemed that God had turned away and that God didn't care or that God wasn't able to meet me in my need and I cried out as surely you have many many times, "My God, my God why hast thou forsaken me?" We have the promise that He will never leave us nor forsake us but from the standpoint of our circumstances there are many times when we feel deserted. If you read the Puritans and I highly recommend that you do read them, those men of God who were willing to lay down their lives and men who suffered imprisonment for the sake of the Gospel, men who in their pastoral ministry would come to grips with the spiritual needs of their people in a way that bears few other examples throughout the history of the church, these men wrote and spoke freely of God's desertions. Those times when we lose the consciousness of His presence. We pray and not only are our prayers not answered but it seems that things even get worse. And to think that the Lord Jesus is touched with all the feeling of our infirmities and I am sure that He was touched by this more deeply than you and I ever will be because the Lord Jesus knew the fellowship with the Father in a far

more wonderful way than you and I do. And oh the agony of soul that was in His own heart when He took these words of David and made them His own words and said, "My God, my God why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me and from the words of my roaring. Oh my God I cry in the daytime but thou hearest not and in the night season and am not silent." But look do you see what He says in the third verse. Do you see what one of the great answers to God's apparent desertions is? Do you see what the answer is when you feel all alone, when prayer is unanswered and you cry out to God and it seems that there is no help. Here is the truth that held Him. Because after expressing His agony of soul in verses 1 and 2 He says, "But thou art holy oh thou that inhabitist the praises of Israel, our fathers trusted in thee, they trusted and thou deliverist them. They cried unto thee and were delivered. They trusted in thee and were not confounded but I am a worm and no man, a reproach of men and despised of people." Do you see what he is saying to God? "Lord I don't really deserve to have you do anything for me but I know you are holy and when I look back over the history of your dealings with your people I don't find one single instance where you ever did the wrong thing or failed ultimately to meet the needs of your people." Did I mention to you the other Sunday what I read from Martin Luther the other day. Martin Luther says, "When you pray, God almost always makes you wait but ultimately the answer comes." There was no foundation that could hold David at this time except this marvelous truth that you and I are considering this morning. "But thou art holy oh thou that inhabitists the praises of Israel." I have one other point.

I hope from that one you will learn that under all circumstances regardless of the severity of the trial you are never wrong in trusting the Lord. But the last one is this and this is perhaps the greatest of all. Since God is holy and God has redeemed us and we are predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, this is a communicable attribute and the Word of God in the Old Testament and the New Testament

teach very clearly that because He is holy so we should be holy too. The Apostle Peter tells us this when he quotes Leviticus 11:44, when he says this, "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all your manner of life." You see this is why the Lord saved us. There are only going to be holy people in heaven. The Lord isn't through with us now. You can see a lot of sin and you can see a lot of frailty and you can see a lot in our lives that shouldn't be there but this is the goal because the One Who called us is holy so we are to be holy and that is what we are going to be when we get to heaven. And you know there is nothing that could be better preparation for coming to the Lord's Table than this. You see there would be no communion supper if Jesus Christ did not die and Jesus Christ would never have died if God were not a holy God. Because by His death which we remember this morning as we take these elements we are remembering the sacrifice which satisfied the holy God and the only offering that can ever satisfy a holy God and we are remembering the sacrifice which makes holy men out of those who are hopeless sinners. Is it any wonder that the Lord Jesus said, "As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup you do show forth the Lord's death, this is done in remembrance of Me and you do it in remembrance of Me until that day when I come and in that day when I come then you are going to see the fulfillment of the very purpose for which the Lord Jesus Christ died." And so as we take the bread and as we take the cup this morning let's remember that we are worshipping a holy God and we are recognizing what a holy God has done for hopeless sinners and in His wonderful grace He has redeemed us. As we usually try to say on Communion Sunday, this is the Lord's Table and if you know the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Savior then you belong here with us remembering the Lord Jesus and let us by prayer and meditation be seeking the Lord as the elements are served that this might be a special time of blessing this morning as we remember our wonderful heavenly Father and what He in absolute holiness has done in sending His Son and providing a sacrifice suitable for sinners.