

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 2/21/93
Exodus 15:11 "What Is Holiness?"

Intro:

There's something dreadfully wrong with the way many people view God.

Illust:

Quote: J. I. Packer in Knowing God, "...that is one reason why our faith is so feeble and our worship so flabby. We are modern men, and modern men, though they cherish great thoughts of man, have as a rule small thoughts of God. When the man in the Church, let alone the man in the street, uses the word 'God', the thought in his mind is rarely of divine majesty. A recent book was called Your God Is Too Small; it was a timely title. We are poles apart from our evangelical forefathers at this point...When you start reading Luther, or Edwards, or Whitefield, though your doctrine may be theirs, you soon find yourself wondering whether you have any acquaintance at all with the mighty God whom they knew so intimately." (74)

What's Packer saying? The same thing Martin Luther pointed out over 400 years ago when he told the great humanist scholar Erasmus, "Your thoughts of God are too human." (Packer, 78)

Unfortunately, the same goes for many of us. Our God is too small. Though God created man in His image, we have recreated God in our image. We don't understand the Majesty and Greatness of God. The bottom line is this. We don't have a handle on God's greatest attribute.

Q: What is God's Greatest Attribute? What sets God apart from all else?

God is holy. That's what we're learning in this present 6 week series on "The Holiness of God." We'll never be the same again once we get a hold of the fact that God is Holy.

Q: But what is Holiness?

We've seen what happens when people are confronted with holiness, but what is it? What does it mean to say that God is Holy?

Proposition: To find out what Holiness is, let's take a close look this morning at the testimony of a man who had several encounters with God's holiness. Moses.

I. Encounter #1--Exodus 3

Truth: A Holy God is Unique.

II. Encounter #2--Exodus 13-14

Truth: A Holy God is Unlimited in His Power.

III. Encounter #3--Exodus 20

Truth: A Holy God is Sacred.

IV. Encounter #4--Exodus 33-34

Truth: A Holy God is Awesome.

V. Encounter #5--Numbers 16

Truth: A Holy God is Jealous.

Moses is specially qualified to teach us what God's Holiness is. In his life, he had a host of encounters with God. We're going to scan 5 of those encounters in a moment. But first, let me say this--The Holiness of God stamped Moses for life.

Key Text: Exodus 15:11 "Who is like unto Thee, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like Thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?"

Who is like God? Who can do what God can do? Obviously, noone! Why not? He is holy.

Q: What did Moses mean when he said God is glorious in holiness?

We want to do a little investigation work this morning. I've surveyed Moses life. It dawned on me that Moses had many personal encounters with God. Let's look at 5 of them, and ask the question, What truth can we learn about God's holiness?

I. Encounter #1--Exodus 3

Truth: A Holy God is Unique.

Background:

The Israelites were slaves in Egypt for 400 years. Life was bleak. Then God sent them a deliverer. His name? Moses. Moses grew up in Pharaoh's house, but left it all to suffer with the people of God. He tried to remedy the Israelites' problem on his own (Ex 2:11-24), but that only got him in hot water! He was coerced to flee to the desert where he spent the next 40 years of his life as an obscure shepherd.

Then came his first confrontation with God.

3:1 "Now Moses kept the flock...came to the mountain of God..."

What happened?

3:2 "And the angel of the LORD appeared (Preincarnate Christ)...bush..."

What impressed Moses?

3:3 "And Moses said, I will see this great sight..."

Moses wasn't amazed that the bush burned. Lots of bushes have burned. But this one burned and wasn't consumed!

Note: Various "explanations" (Davis, 69)

Then God spoke to Moses. What did He say?

1. He called his name (4). "Moses, Moses" (note repetition)
2. He told him to stop (5a).

This should be translated, "Stop coming near as you are doing." God doesn't forbid men to approach Him. He invites us to come. But He demands that we recognize something very important about Him. What?

3. God told Moses that He is Holy.

V 5 "Put off thy shoes, for the place is HOLY ground."

This is the first time in the Bible we find the word "holy."

Q: What made the ground holy? Did it glow? Was the soil radioactive?

A: Listen. What made the ground holy was the Presence of God.

Soil is soil. Moses didn't worship the Holy Ground. He worshiped the Holy God. Be careful of worshipping an object (eg--Shroud of Jesus, splinters from the cross, even elements in the Communion service).

Moses was in the presence of a Holy God. Like Isaiah, and Minoah, and Job, and Joshua, and Habakkuk, and others whom God personally confronted with His Holy presence, Moses never got over this encounter.

How did Moses respond?

V 6 "And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God."

God continued his speech. He told Moses he was the man. He was going to rescue the Israelites from Egyptian bondage (10). Moses said, "Who Me?" (11)

Moses was confused and intimidated. "God I don't really know You. If I go to Egypt and tell them God sent me to deliver the descendants of Abraham, they're going to say, 'Wait a minute! What God? What's His Name?' What will I say God?"

3:14 "And God said, I AM THAT I AM..."

Without going into great detail, I want you to see this. How did God reveal Himself to Moses in v 14? As the "I AM." As Yahweh. As Jehovah. The word means, "I am the One who is."

Here's the first truth Moses learned about God's holiness. Because God is holy He is Unique. He is One of a kind. He is self-existent. He has no beginning and no ending. As the Creator, He is separated from and superior to His creation. He is totally Unique.

Do you view God that way?

Hanna recognized that. I Sam 2:2 "There is none holy like the LORD; for there is none beside Thee, neither is there any rock like our God."

Isaiah recorded that God is unique.

Is 45:5 "I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside Me."

The God of the Bible is not One among many gods. He is God. He is Unique.

Illust:

Moses left the mountain that day, a changed man. He went back to Egypt. He saw God perform the 10 miraculous plagues. He saw God harden Pharaoh's heart to the point where Pharaoh begged Moses and the Israelites to leave Egypt.

Which led to Moses' second encounter with God's holiness.

II. Encounter #2--Exodus 13-14

Truth: A Holy God is Unlimited in His Power.

You know the story. After the Hebrews left Egypt, Pharaoh changed his mind. He rounded up his army and set out after the Israelites. He cornered them at the Red Sea. There they were, 2 million plus, with nowhere to go.

Until God intervened. He told Moses, "What are you worrying about?!"

14:15-18 "And the LORD said, Wherefore criest thou?...I will get Me honor..."

You know what happened. God split the sea wide open, and created a dry path for His people to cross. Then, when His own were safely on the other side, He coaxed the Egyptians to follow, and washed them away with a mighty torrent of water.

Q: What kind of impression did that make on Moses?

A: Moses sang a song! (the first recorded song in the Bible?)

15:1 "Then Moses sang...I will sing unto the LORD, for He has triumphed..."

15:11 "Who is like unto Thee...glorious in Holiness..."

Q: What impacted Moses about God? His Mighty Power!

Truth: A Holy God is Unlimited in His Power.

There's nothing too hard for God! His power is unlimited!

Illust:

Q: What problems are you facing? You can trust in God.

Tran: Two episodes--We've seen that because God is Holy, He is Unique, and Unlimited in His power.

III. Encounter #3--Exodus 20

Truth: A Holy God is Sacred.

Word Study:

In the Bible, "holy" means more than "God doesn't sin."

= (Hebrew "qadesh") to be separate; to be apart or consecrated

Holiness is apartness, uniqueness. To say that God is holy means you can't put Him in a box. Holiness is the opposite of being common or commonplace. God is not common or ordinary. He is sacred. He is set apart.

Note: By the way, so are Christians. The Bible calls Christians what? "saints"--from the same root word as holy; Christians are literally "holy ones."

So God is set apart from all else. He is sacred. He is unique.

Key: That's what makes Idolatry so terrible. When men take a created object and use that object to represent the Creator, man is guilty of a gross violation. He is trying to bring God down to a human level.

Illust: Idols in Africa Illust: Worshiping a Crucifix

Illust: Reducing God to a picture in your house

Illust: Having wrong thoughts about God

Q: What truth did God teach Moses about Himself in the Exodus 20 episode?

Truth: A Holy God is Sacred.

God made that truth very clear to Moses in his next encounter with God. God brought His people to Mt. Sinai. Notice what instructions He gave Moses.

19:10 "...sanctify them..."

Why?

19:11 "...on the third day, the LORD will come down in the sight of all the people."

What else did God instruct Moses to do in order to sanctify the people?

19:12 "And thou shalt set bounds unto the people..."

What's going on? Unholy people can't infringe upon a Holy God.

What happened next? God gave His people the 10 commands.

20:1 "And God spoke all these words..."

Thou shalt have no other gods (3). Thou shalt not make carved images (4).

Thou shalt not. Thou shalt not. 10 times.

Commands 1-4 How to Live in a Right Relationship with a Holy God

Commands 6-10 How to Live Rightly with Fellow Man

Key: God did not give His people 10 suggestions, but 10 commands.

That's the way it is with a Holy God. He is sacred. His revelation is sacred.

It's not a "take it or leave it" matter. Because He is holy, He demands that we be holy.

Q: Are you obeying God's sacred Word in your life?

When we sin, do you know what we're doing? We're challenging God's holiness. We're defying His authority. As Sproul puts it, we commit Cosmic Treason.

Illust:

Tran: Moses learned that a Holy God is Unique, Unlimited in His power, and Sacred.

IV. Encounter #4--Exodus 33-34

Truth: A Holy God is Awesome.

We looked at this text a couple of weeks ago. In Ex 33, Moses is still on the Holy Mountain. He brought to God a very unusual request.

33:18 "...Show me your glory."

You remember what happened. God put Moses in the cleft of the rock. Then He passed by Moses, and permitted him to see the brilliance of His backside (His "afterglow").

Q: Did you ever notice what God said to Moses when He passed by?

34:6-7 "...The LORD, merciful and gracious, long-suffering..."

Listen. God's Holiness has not only to do with His righteousness and justice, but also His Mercy and Love. His Love is a Holy Love. That is, God's Love is totally unique. It's infinitely greater than any human love. His Mercy is a Holy Mercy. That is, our human minds can't fathom the depths of gracious favor towards us.

Quote: Jerry Bridges, The Pursuit of Holiness, "Holiness is the perfection of all His other attributes: His power is holy power, His mercy is holy mercy, His wisdom is Holy wisdom. It is His holiness more than any other attribute that makes Him worthy of our praise." (29)

Quote: Stephen Charnock, The Existence and Attributes of God, says that God's Holiness is His greatest title of honor (110). He is incomparable.

Q: Is there a word which best sums up what it means to say that God is holy?

34:10 "...for it is an awe-inspiring thing that I will do with thee."

"awe-inspiring" = terrible (KJV); awesome (NIV)

Listen. God is Awesome. He really is. It's a shame that word is so misused.

Illust: Awesome Car! Awesome Dunk! Awesome Hairdo!
That which is "awesome" is that which creates awe.

Key: Only God is truly awesome. Only God is unique. When individuals like Moses enter the presence of a holy God, they fall on their knees, speechless.

Objection: "That's not true in my life. God is not awesome to me. In fact, He's irrelevant to my life. He doesn't create awe in my life."

Do you know why? You don't really know God. Once you see God as He really is, you'll never be the same again.

Illust:

Tran: What is Holiness? A Holy God is unique, unlimited in His power, Sacred, Awesome.

V. Encounter #5--Numbers 16

Truth: A Holy God is Jealous.

For the sake of time, we won't read the account. Let me remind you of the highlights. It's the story of Korah.

Korah was a power-hungry Levite. He despised Moses. In fact, he was jealous of Moses. One day, he rallied the people against Moses, and threw some blatant accusations against God's anointed leader (3). "God's not on your side Moses!"

Q: Do you remember how Moses responded?

16:5 "And he spoke to Korah, Tomorrow the Lord will show who are his...and holy."

Korah was playing games with God. He tried to use God to promote his own cause. But Moses drew the line in the sand. "Korah, God is holy. He's unique. He demands holiness. You don't play games with God, Korah. You don't try to use God to accomplish your own agenda. Just wait until tomorrow."

The next day came. What happened?

Check out Num 16 and you'll see. God told Moses to tell the people who feared him, "Get away from Korah (24)." They did (27).

And then it happened. God opened up the ground and swallowed alive Korah and his band of rebels.

Q: "How do you explain that?"

A: God is Holy.

Truth: A Holy God is Jealous. God will not play second fiddle in our lives. He doesn't want our leftovers. He wants and deserves our all.

Illust:

Q: Why doesn't a holy God consume US when we sin? See Lament 3:22.

Exodus 15:11 "Who is like unto Thee, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like Thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?"

O friend, do you realize the price our Holy God paid so that we might be right with Him? He loved us when we were unlovely, and sent His holy Son, Jesus Christ, to die in our place on Calvary.