

Holy is He!

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Preacher: Donald Smith

[0 : 00] As we consider it together. Father, we thank you and praise you that when we cry out to you and we call upon your name, you answer.

! Lord, you speak. We thank you that you have spoken to us now through your word by your Holy Spirit. And so we pray, Lord, that that seed of your word would be planted deep inside our hearts, that it might grow, and that we might love the Lord Jesus more because of it. In his name we pray. Amen.

I wonder if any of you have ever been described as one of a kind. You are one of a kind. I've been, I think, called it a few times. I'm waiting for it to be a positive.

It will come one day, I'm sure. Maybe. When we say someone is one of a kind, we usually mean, don't we, that there is something that kind of stands out about them.

Something that sets them a little apart from the crowd. But this evening, this evening we are going to be thinking about the only one who is truly one of a kind.

[1 : 22] Not just standing out from the crowd, but standing alone in a crowd of one. We began this evening's service with the words, holy, holy, holy.

Because the one true living God we gather to worship every Sunday in Christ Jesus is just that. Holy, holy, holy.

I don't know if you saw, we actually read that. Just as we went through Psalm 99 just a minute ago. Just look there with me. First of all, at the end of verse 3.

Holy is he. And again, at the end of verse 5. Holy is he. Holy is he. And then again, at the end of verse 9. For the Lord our God is holy. Holy, holy, holy. That is who God is.

[2 : 30] That is what this psalm is all about. And this evening, we're going to just begin by thinking a little bit about what holiness is. It's maybe not an everyday word, is it?

And then having done that, we'll just look at each of these three sections in the psalm that close with this wonderful declaration of God's holiness. So, let's just begin with a brief definition of what it means to be holy.

Norman actually helped us out in his prayer earlier. I think we've said it before, but at its most basic level, to be holy is to be set apart and pure.

Set apart and pure. That is why you see, don't you, in the Old Testament, kind of temple ornaments, right, tables and bread are described as holy because they are set apart for God's and they are pure.

They are clean. They are untarnished. That is also why the church, right, believers in the New Testament are called holy.

[3 : 39] God has set us apart for himself and made us pure, cleansed us with the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. But when it comes to God being holy, we don't want to kind of change the definition as if it's something completely different, but we want to sort of multiply it by infinity.

Our holiness and God's holiness is much like our knowledge and God's knowledge or our love and God's love.

We are absolutely speaking about the same category of thing, but at the same time, they are very different. Our knowledge is limited, isn't it?

It is finite. Sometimes it's mistaken. God's knowledge is absolute. It is infinite. It is never mistaken. Our love is real, but it is fickle. It is fragile. It is limited. There are bounds to it, but God's love is absolute.

[4 : 52] It is utterly steadfast and unshakable, and there are no bounds to it. We really are holy as God's people, cleansed by Christ.

But when it comes to God's holiness, for God to be set apart and pure means that we are saying that God is, that he is completely other.

And absolutely perfect. There is none like him.

He truly is one of a kind. Not that he has some standout features, but that there is no one and no thing that compares in any way to him.

It's not just that he is a bit better than us or a bit bigger than us. He is in a completely different category of being to all his creation. He is completely other, and he is absolutely perfect.

[6:00] It's not only that he lacks blemishes, it's that there cannot be anything better about him. I think that maybe the difference between kind of not getting anything wrong on an exam.

You manage not to make any mistakes. That is pure. But God, it's not just that he doesn't get anything wrong. It's that he knows absolutely every single thing about everyone and everything. He knows our thoughts. He knows what's going on our side of the heads. It's a kind of knowledge, isn't it? That no matter how much we learn, we will never be able to get. He is perfect.

So when we speak of God's holiness, we are saying that he is completely other and absolutely perfect. None like him. And that is the glorious truth that Psalm 99 wants us to dwell on.

As Psalm sort of considers God's holiness from three different angles. His enthronement, his righteousness, and his forgiveness.

[7:12] There is, of course, so much more that could be said, but we'll hopefully see by the end why it is good and right to dwell on these three particular aspects of God's holiness at this point in this collection of Psalms.

So this evening, we're simply going to follow the holy, holy, holy of this Psalm. They're looking at it together in three points there. Hopefully, you'll see them in your service sheet in front of you. So let's begin there in verses one to three as we see why the psalmist calls us to tremble.

Tremble before the holy Lord who is enthroned on high. But for the fourth time in just the last seven Psalms, we hear explicitly there in verse one that the Lord reigns.

But as with each occasion before this, we are kind of not just being presented here with bare repetition. Right? Every time that the very same reign of the very same Lord, every time it's been mentioned, it has caused each Psalm to focus on a particular result or response of this eternal and universal truth.

And this time in Psalm 99, this Psalm that is all about holiness, the otherness and perfection of God's. This Psalm brings into focus the chasm, the infinitely wide gap that there is between the Lord who reigns on high and the earth that quakes beneath Him.

[9:04] Just let me read again those first few verses and see the way the language, right? The poetry here is used to emphasize the otherness of the reigning Lord.

The Lord reigns, the people tremble. He sits enthroned over the cherubim.

The earth quakes. He is great in Zion. He is exalted over all peoples.

Let them praise your great and awesome name. Holy. Holy is He.

Holy is He. We've talked a lot, haven't we, about kings and thrones and palaces in this series. And rightly so, right? These Psalms lend themselves to that imagery.

[10:09] But you see what it is about the king's throne that Psalm 99 is bringing into focus. It's not just telling us, is it again, that there is a throne that God reigns from. It is telling us, singing to us, that this throne is so, so, so far above us.

He is exalted over all people. He's enthroned upon the cherubim, right?

These mighty angels, as one commentator puts it, these cherubim, they're ones who are fierce enough to wield a flaming sword, fast enough to speed God to the rescue of His king, strong enough to provide protection under their wings.

The very creatures who barred the way to paradise and the ones who stand by the mercy seat of atonement. Cherubim are mighty, mighty creatures. They are beyond our comprehension in their position and their power.

And yet they too are mere creatures under the throne of God. The Lord is a king over every other king, but He is not a king like any other king.

[11:26] We have lots, don't we, in this world of kings or a president or a prime minister who think they're very powerful. But even at their most powerful, what can they do?

They can make laws, can't they? They can punish people for breaking those laws. They can spend money. They can set policies. They can fight wars. They can take over territory.

But who amongst them really reigns? Absolutely. I mean, how much frustration have we seen pour out from arguably the most powerful man in the world, even just over the last couple of weeks? Right, that the president of the United States, how much frustration have we seen in him because things keep happening in ways that he doesn't want them to?

That is the most powerful man in the world. But he's not in control, is he? There are many, many in this world and in the history of this world of that kind of king.

[12:38] Who is like this? Who amongst them reigns absolutely?

Whose dominion lasts for eternity? Who is absolutely sovereign? Who amongst them actually dictates what everything in the world is doing and where the whole universe is going? Who? Right, who can calm this wind or still the seas? Who can raise mountains or empty oceans? Who has control over the weather? Or the planets or the stars and the galaxies, right? Which king? What president holds that in their hands? There is none, is there? There is none like that.

There is no one that comes close because that kind of king is a completely different kind of king. But that is who the Lord who reigns is.

[13:49] Lord of lords and king of kings, but a lord and king like no other. He holds everything in his hands. Nothing happens.

Nothing exists apart from his word. Listen to what the apostle Paul writes of Jesus in Colossians 1. He says, By him, all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities.

All things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things. And in him, all things hold together.

Again, in Hebrews, he, that is Jesus, is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature. And he upholds the universe by the word of his power.

Jesus himself said, In the all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. The Lord reigns.

[15:02] Jesus reigns. And his reign is holy. There is nothing that is not subject to his rule.

There is nothing that is not under his command. There is not an atom. There is not a single atom in this whole universe that Jesus is not reigning over right now.

He reigns. He reigns perfectly. And he reigns in a manner that is so other, distinct, and set apart. That when we think on that kind of lordship, we can only say, can't we?

Holy is he. Holy is he. So let the peoples tremble.

Let the earth quake. We were thinking last week, weren't we, about singing joyfully and wholeheartedly to the Lord. Let's be clear that this psalm is not in any way detracting from that call to real, true, genuine, joyful praise.

[16:17] But I really are to tremble and quake. Not in uncertain fear, but in genuine awe.

And reverence of his reign. When you come into his presence on a Sunday, when you live under his reign through the week, remember that he is holy.

We don't come flippantly. We come kind of blasé, do we? We come trembling before his great and awesome name.

So first, let us tremble before the Lord who is enthroned on high. Secondly, let us bow before the King who loves justice.

Bow before the King who loves justice. I wonder if you were to write a list of what you loved.

[17:23] Maybe just even kind of a top ten. I wonder what would be on it. Lots of good things, I imagine. Family, friends, hobbies, holidays.

All really good things. I'm not here to judge your list. Whether it is people, places, activities, or things. What do they all have in common, though? We all, well, we want what we love, don't we? None of those things, if they were offered to us, would we say, ah, actually, no, not right now. If you love your spouse, you want to be with them. If you love Paris, you want to be there.

If you love golf, you want to be on the golf course. We want what we love. The Lord who reigns loves justice.

And so that is what he wants. For the Holy King, justice is not a duty.

[18:31] It is a delight. We all know that feeling, don't we? Where we are torn between doing what we want to do and doing what we know is the right thing to do.

We all know that feeling, don't we? But God does not. No such distinction has ever existed in him.

He loves justice. He loves what is right. The right thing to do is always what he wants to do. If you've been with us over even just a few of the last Sunday evenings, you'll know that just as the Lord reigns, it has been a repeated theme.

So is the Lord's justice. But again, what has kind of been brought into the limelight here in Psalm 99 is the otherness and the perfection, the holiness of the Holy King's justice.

For the king loves justice, and he has established it. He has established equity.

[19 : 43] That means that God, completely unlike any other, not only does he do what is right, he determines what is right. He is the one who draws the line in the sand.

And in establishing it, he makes sure it never moves. Morality, rightness, it is not subjective because the Holy King has determined exactly what is right and what is wrong.

A line in the sand maybe isn't the best picture for that. Maybe think more of like, I don't know, a mountain range. Traveling due north, due south.

That is how the Lord establishes equity. It is straight, it is true, and it is unchangeable. No one can move it. Only the Holy Lord who reigns absolutely can bring about true and lasting justice.

Because he is the one who loves justice. He is the one who establishes justice, and he is the one who brings about justice. A holy justice.

[20 : 59] One that not only convicts criminals, but one that truly restores victims. Not only punishing wrong, but making right.

This psalm not only reminds us who God is. In doing so, it tells us what he will one day do. There is a day coming when the judge of all the earth will make all things right, because that is what he loves, and he is the one who reigns.

There is a day coming when the risen Lord Jesus will judge the living and the dead. There is a day coming when he will return to once and for all make all things new.

And reign in a kingdom where the wrongs of this world have not only been justly condemned, but the damage done by them will once and for all be restored.

If you have suffered grievously. If you have suffered grievously. If you have suffered grievously at the hands of evil.

[22 : 16] And you carry the wounds of that wickedness day by day. Hold on to the very real, true hope of this day.

When the Holy King will bring about the justice which he loves. And restore you, make you whole again. That is what he executes in Jacob.

That is his people. His church. You and me. The Holy King loves justice.

The Holy King establishes justice. The Holy King will enact justice. And again, in this psalm, we are supposed to be asking, who else?

What other king truly loves justice? What other king himself establishes equity? What other king can not only punish wrong, but restore and make right?

[23 : 21] Who else? Who else? There is none like him.

So come and worship him as the Holy King. Come and see what it says there. Exalt him. And worship at his footstool.

Do you see how even in the way that we are called to come and worship, recognizes and rejoices in God's holiness? Lift him up and come beneath him.

Humbly worship the King who loves justice. So we've seen, haven't we? We tremble before the Holy Lord who reigns.

We bow before the Holy King who loves justice. And then thirdly and finally, we worship the Holy God who forgives those who call on him.

[24 : 24] The Holy King's justice is good. And it is absolutely right to come and worship him because of it.

But we are left once more with that question inside of us, aren't we? To anyone who is able to reflect openly and honestly on their own life, on their own failings. Our failings are in what we have said, in what we have done, in what we have thought, in what we have not said and not done.

The Holy King who loves justice as much as it is a glorious picture. Well, it can also be a fearful thought, can't it? Maybe you feel you are not able to bow humbly before the King who loves justice because you are in fact filled with fear.

Fear about the fate that would await you if a truly just judge came and brought about absolute justice.

I think it is exactly that concern that brings the psalmist at this point to turn his attention to Moses, Aaron, and Samuel. They might, at first reading, kind of seem to appear on the stage out of nowhere, come a little out of the blue, but as the psalm says, each of these men, each of them called upon the name of the Lord on behalf of his people.

[26 : 03] When God's people sinned, these were the men who cried out as priests to God for mercy. And there are two key things that I think we learn as we just read through those couple of verses at the end there from 6 to 8.

God answered. But the priests themselves sinned. So see first how God responds.

End of verse 6, they call to the Lord and he answered them. In the pillar of cloud, he spoke to them.

Verse 8, O Lord our God, you answered them.

As holy as other, as perfect as God is, as far from us as he is in his being and in his moral perfection in every way, he still comes and speaks to us.

He still hears when we cry out. But even better than that he speaks is what he says. Verse 8, right, you are forgiven.

[27 : 24] You are unrighteous, but God responds in forgiveness. But the priests themselves live in sin.

He says even to Moses, Aaron, and Samuel, I forgive you, but I don't overlook your sins. I think verses 6 to 8 there are almost intentionally, not confusing the original readers, but leave them knowing something's missing.

How can the God of justice forgive people and still punish their sins? It's not just a piece of the puzzle that is missing, is it?

It is the capstone that holds everything together. Even though those, even though God heard, heard the calls of sinners, separated from him by their moral failings and unable to approach him in his holiness, the question, of course, is how?

How does he hear them? How does he forgive them? How can he be just and forgiving? How can we approach a God who is this holy and loves justice when we are so sinful?

[28 : 46] We need a priest, don't we? A priest was someone who would go before God on behalf of the people.

But we need a priest who can really go before God into his holiness. We need a priest who is holy like God is holy. a priest who can truly take our sins away.

That is what these verses cry out for. A greater priest who is holy like God is holy, who God hears and who carries our sin.

And there is only one. There is only one, the Bible tells us, one great high priest, only one true mediator between God and man, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We, humanity, together in our smallness and our sinfulness, we, we could not come before a holy God who is a consuming fire unless God himself comes to us and says, I will do it for you.

[30 : 12] And that is exactly what he has done. The words became flesh. God's became man.

And the one who was fully God and fully man, he bore our sins as our great high priest and went willingly to the cross of Calvary.

There, to Calvary, went the king who loves justice and speaks a word of forgiveness. At the cross, justice and forgiveness would meet.

For those who call upon his name, the sin was paid for and the sinner was saved. And when Jesus rose again, he ascended to the highest heights, to the right hand of the Lord who reigns, where right now, right now, at this moment, he is interceding for us.

The sinless and eternal faithful priest calls out to God on our behalf so that we who might at one time have feared the holy king who loves justice, we can joyfully and confidently come into his holy presence in the name of Jesus.

[31 : 53] Forgiven of everything forever, looking forward to a just and righteous reign in a new creation where all things will be made new.

He does reign now. He reigns in the church, He reigns over the world. Why, you might wonder, does it not feel like it, look like it every day on the news?

Well, the answer is that He is patient and He is waiting for everyone who will come to Him in Jesus to come.

Maybe that is you here this evening. is God patiently waiting for you to come to Jesus, to call upon His name, to find forgiveness in Him before He will bring the justice He loves and make all things

new.

We are forgiven when we call upon the name of the Lord who reigns God's because there is none like Jesus. Holy is He.

[33 : 15] And so here we have a psalm in the hands of the wandering exiles that reminds them of God's absolute otherness, His incomparable reign, His perfect righteousness, His incredible forgiveness.

What does it say to a people who have seen their kingdom shaken and their world turned upside down, who do not know what the future holds?

what does this psalm say to them? There is none like your God.

There is none like Him. The otherness of God should, shouldn't it, I think, cause us to stop humbly in our tracks when we wonder what He is doing and instead of wondering, worship.

when we ask why He is not doing things our way. When the exiles who were reading this psalm wondered why He let Jerusalem fall, why did He let the exiles wander, when we wonder why our world is full of chaos and our lives are full of turmoil, why is it not happening our way?

[34 : 42] holy. We must remember that He is holy. His reign and His justice and His forgiveness are holy.

So while life might not go the way we always want it to go, we can be confident that God has all things in His hand, that He is working all things for goods, and that He is working all things for us, for those who call upon His name and find forgiveness in Him.

His ways are not our ways because they are infinitely better and infinitely greater, even when we cannot understand them because He is holy.

So come and worship Him. Worship Him for what other King? What other King reigns over heaven and earth?

What other ruler is exalted over all peoples? What other judge loves justice? What other being establishes righteousness?

[36 : 04] forgiveness? What other God speaks? What other God hears the calls of His people for mercy and forgiveness?

Who else? Who else would send their one and only Son so that on the cross justice and forgiveness would meet?

What other God avenges sin and forgives sinner? Who else reigns? Who else reigns like the Lord reigns?

Who else? There is none like Him. Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God almighty.

So let us worship Him. Let us do that as we pray together now. Lord, you are holy.

[37 : 21] we confess your greatness this evening, that you are Lord of all, that you alone hold all things in your hands, that you alone are perfect in righteousness, that you alone love justice, that you alone speak to your people and send them a Savior when they call on you, that you alone forgive us in our sins, when we call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, whom you sent to save us, that we might be holy to you.

So Lord, may we come and worship you, may we bow down before your holy throne, for there is none like you. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.