



Pleasant Ridge Baptist Church

The Sermon on the Mount - Part 1 • God is holy • Psalm 99:1-9 • 06/24/2018

Main Point

God's holiness calls me to be holy.

Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

When have you seen or experienced something you would describe as one-of-a-kind?

Were you inspired by what you saw or experienced? Frightened? Encouraged?

Truly unique or one-of-a-kind objects or experiences have a variety of effects on us. Some encourage and inspire us, while others may make us very uneasy or cautious. We may have a similar experience with God, who is truly unique and other. This trait is known as holiness, and it is the topic of discussion today.

Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| WATCH THE DVD SEGMENT FOR SESSION 1.

In this video message, Freddy talks about God's holiness and how this fundamental biblical truth helps us know and understand God. We can't know God and accurately understand what He is doing in our lives and in the world without understanding His holiness. Freddy also speaks of two truths related to God's holiness—His transcendence and His immanence. Transcendence means that God is separate from and above all creation. There is nothing or no one like Him. Immanence means that though He is holy, God is also intimately involved in our everyday lives. So, what does His holiness mean for us? It means we can trust Him and trust that He is working in and through our lives.

In what ways does understanding God's holiness motivate you to pursue holiness in your own life?

In his video message, Freddy says, “God always acts in accordance with who He is. And who He is never changes.” As it relates to holiness, what implications do you think this truth should have on how you live out your life day to day?

The holiness and sovereignty of God is the theme of Psalm 99. The psalm can be divided into three divisions, and each division concludes with the exclamation of God’s holiness. Psalm 99 not only declares the holiness of God, but it describes His holiness in light of His righteous and just character. The psalm shows us how God demonstrates His holiness. As one of the enthronement psalms (see Pss. 93–100), it affirms God’s rule over the earth.

| have a volunteer read Psalm 99:1-3.

When was a time God’s holiness became real to you?

Biblical use of the term “holy” has to do primarily with God’s separating from the world, which He chooses to devote to Himself. God Himself is also holy, meaning all of His attributes are completely perfect, and He is set apart from all of His creation. This psalm celebrates the holiness of God in many ways. First, note the triple declaration of verses 3,5,9: “He is holy...He is holy...The Lord our God is holy.” Closely related to God’s holiness is the sense of awe it provokes: “The peoples tremble.” Even nature responds: “Let the earth quake.” One can never truly encounter our holy God and be emotionally untouched. This was the prophet Isaiah’s experience when He received a vision of God on His heavenly throne. The psalmist also highlights God’s perfect justice, which we see in the next set of verses.

| have a volunteer read Psalm 99:4-5.

How does God’s justice, fairness, or righteousness impact your daily routine?

How often do you feel the impact of God’s justice, fairness, or righteousness?

| have a volunteer read Psalm 99:6-9.

What do these verses teach us about a lifestyle of worship?

In what ways can you cultivate a heart of reverent worship in response to God’s holiness?

How can we tremble at God’s holiness yet still have an intimate relationship with Him?

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

How can we support each other in our efforts to grow closer with God?

What steps can you take this week to increase your exposure to (or awareness of) God's holiness?

In what ways can you exalt the Lord this week? How can you give Him praise each and every day? Be specific.

Pray

Ask for prayer requests and ask group members to pray for the different requests as intercessors. Close this time by committing the members of your group to the Lord and asking Him to convict the hearts of everyone present regarding the importance of His holiness and its implications in your lives.

Visit lifeway.com to purchase the Bible study book for more in-depth individual and group study.

Commentary

| Psalm 99:1-3

Psalm 99 is one of several psalms known as enthronement psalms because of the opening words, the Lord reigns. The word order is emphatic in the Hebrew, placing the covenant name for God—Yahweh or the Lord—ahead of the verb rather than behind as usual. As a result of God's reign, the psalmist said, Let the peoples tremble. A proper understanding of divine sovereignty results in people acknowledging God's superiority. Reverential fear, the meaning of tremble in this verse, is the legitimate response of created beings to the overwhelming majesty of their Creator. God is separate from and above all creation. God decreed that craftsmen make two cherubim to oversee the ark in the most holy place (see Ex. 25:18-22). These golden images represented angelic servants of God in heaven. God's people understood the Lord was in the most holy place enthroned above the cherubim.

The command to let the earth quake refers to a metaphorical yet nonetheless real attitude of awe and respect for the one true God. The psalmist next spoke of God's greatness. He is great in Zion, the land of God's people, particularly Jerusalem. Once again the covenant name, Yahweh, comes first in Hebrew for emphasis. Lest anyone get the notion Zion is the only purview of God's greatness, the psalmist added, He is exalted above all the peoples. The form of the verb exalted emphasizes the on-going act of "being exalted." Thus at no time in history is any people above the Lord. The psalmist called for earth's peoples to praise God's great and awe-inspiring name. Notice the transition from the third person references about the Lord in 99:1-2, to the second person direct address in 99:3a, Your great and awe-inspiring name. This shift from speaking about God to talking with Him seems to indicate the psalmist himself was caught up in the awe inspired by God's name. The phrase awe-inspiring renders a single Hebrew verb meaning "to be feared." Once again, this "fear" or awe refers to reverential respect appropriate towards the Creator of all life.

In just two and a half verses the psalmist established the Lord reigns, He is enthroned above the cherubim, He is great in Zion, He is exalted above all peoples, and His name is great and awe-inspiring. Attendant to God's qualities, all peoples of earth are to tremble, quake, and praise. These words are the vocabulary of worship. Precisely because the Lord reigns, people should revere and praise Him. Yet, the psalmist had not fully made his most important point. In a terse three words, He is holy (two words in Hebrew), he proclaimed the heart of his message. This Lord who reigns and who has the awe-inspiring name is holy. The Hebrew term means to be set apart or to be sanctified.

| Psalm 99:4-5

The psalmist held a high view of God as the eternal Ruler of the universe. As such, he addressed Him as the mighty King. One key attribute of this mighty King is that He loves justice. The term justice basically refers to the equitable treatment of all people. The idea of God being a mighty King who loves justice portrays His concern for how people treat one another on a daily basis, even in their pursuit of the mundane things of life. God is holy, but He is also involved in our everyday affairs. Along with the view of God as the mighty King who loves justice is the belief that He Himself established fairness. You have established fairness is emphatic in Hebrew. The term fairness renders a Hebrew word meaning uprightness or straightness. The psalmist was acknowledging and praising God for establishing fairness in human society. God expects people to treat one another in an equitable manner, just as they would have others treat them.

The psalmist continued his praise of Yahweh: You have administered justice and righteousness. Once again the word order in Hebrew is emphatic, emphasizing both justice and righteousness as the results of divine activity and emphasizing His action of administering these in human society. Righteousness is an important term. The Hebrew refers to conformity to God's standards or norms. The mighty King who loves justice set down covenant stipulations, known as the Ten Commandments, for right living. Any person who deliberately adapted his or her life to those stipulations was considered righteous. Conformity to God's covenant stipulations would result in the establishment of justice. The psalmist redirected his attention from God to the members of the covenant community, commanding them to exalt the Lord our God. The verb exalt means to raise up or to extol someone as being superior to oneself. Exalting God involved praising, worshiping, adoring, and appreciating Him.

The psalmist instructed the covenant community to bow in worship at His footstool. The Hebrew verb literally means to bow oneself down to the ground. To get on one's knees and to put one's face to the ground was considered the posture of greatest humility. Such a humble posture was appropriate in the presence of the mighty King. Just as he had done earlier when speaking of the Lord's awe-inspiring name (see 99:3), so once again the psalmist reminded worshipers that He is holy. That Yahweh is holy is the psalmist's most important point, forming the very heart of his message. Only because Yahweh is holy does He choose to reign and to establish justice and righteousness.

History provided an excellent source for the psalmist to illustrate Yahweh's greatness and how His holiness formed the foundation of the covenant community. He identified Moses and Aaron as being among God's priests. The psalmist then noted Samuel also was among those calling on His name. Calling on God's name refers specifically to worship or to prayer, and generally to awareness of God's leadership in one's life. The psalmist intended to show the vertical relationship involved in the lives of Israel's leadership that had resulted in the life and health of the covenant community. The reminder that He answered them served to encourage all covenant community members to call on His name expecting an answer. God answered His people's prayers in a variety of ways.

As God's people journeyed from Egypt toward the promised land, God made His presence known to them with a pillar of cloud. He also gave them a pillar of fire by night (see Ex. 13:22). At any moment along the way, they could be assured of His presence simply by looking at the pillar hovering near them. The psalmist shifted focus from the people back to God, addressing Him as Lord our God. He then listed three aspects of God's interactions with His people. First, He answered them, a restatement of 99:6. God took the initiative to reveal Himself to His people. However, He also made Himself available to them whenever they called on His name. Second, the psalmist acknowledged, You were a forgiving God to them. Forgiving renders a Hebrew verb meaning to lift up. When God forgives us, He lifts up the burden of sin off our conscience allowing us once again to breathe spiritually. The psalmist thirdly noted God was an avenger of their sinful actions. This statement served to dissuade people from thinking God automatically forgave sins. Rather, sin has to be confessed. The sinner is to acknowledge his or her wrongdoing and repent from that course of thought or action. The psalmist concluded by instructing the people once again to exalt the Lord our God.

As he had done before (see 99:5), he called on them to bow in worship. The calls to bow in worship at His footstool (see Ps. 99:5) and to bow in worship at His holy mountain (see 99:9) are two ways of saying the same thing. The mountain is made holy through its association with the holy God. The final words from the psalmist's pen were the Lord our God is holy. He expanded his earlier expression He is holy (see 99:3,5) to include the personal covenant name Yahweh or the Lord and the title our God, two ways of stressing the covenant relationship between Yahweh and His people, while at the same time emphasizing His holiness.