

## **Holy Is the Lord**

2Samuel 6:1-23

*I heard a preacher say in a sermon once, “The word Holy is where we come to the end of our ability to describe God.”*

The basic meaning of the word is for something to be distinct or separate from other things.

When the bible uses the word holy to talk about God it is declaring that the LORD is different or separate from everything in creation in the excellence/purity of His moral perfections and His divine attributes.

We find one of the clearest displays of God’s holiness in the book of Exodus.

When the people of Israel come out of Egypt and arrive at Mt. Sinai, we are told in Exodus 19 that God made His glory visibly present on the Mountain.

He told Moses to set up a boundary around the mountain so that no one other than Moses would approach the mountain.

When the people see the evidence of God’s presence and hear His voice they are terrified and the bible says “they stood far off” and pleaded with Moses to act on their behalf because they could not bear the holiness of the LORD.

*That scene raises a question, “How does a Holy God dwell in the midst of an unholy people?”*

In the book of Exodus a place called the Tabernacle is the answer.

The Tabernacle is a tent that the LORD gave very particular instructions about.

The inner most part of the tent is called the holy of holies.

The reason it is called the Holy of Holies is because when the Tabernacle was completed God caused His glory to become visibly present in that space.

That area was blocked off by a heavy curtain, and no one could go in except the high priest and he could only go in once a year in a very prescribed way.

Outside that was the holy place where only priests could enter to go about their duties for maintaining worship.

The tent was surrounded by a courtyard and then around the courtyard the people of Israel camped.

Do you see the picture? The picture is a Holy God dwelling in the midst of His people.

There is a clear distinction between where God’s glory appears and the people.

*That is why the Tabernacle and all the people and things associated with it are also called holy, because those things were set apart for the LORD as a visible reminder that He was dwelling in the midst of His people.*

Likely the most important object in the tabernacle is something called the ‘ark of the covenant’. The ark was a box roughly forty five inches long, twenty seven inches wide, and twenty seven inches tall.

It was made from Acacia wood and overlaid with gold.

Among other ornate components to the box there were two representations of angelic beings called Cherubs carved as one piece with what Exodus calls the mercy seat.

The Cherubs were carved facing one another with their wings spread over top of the Ark covering the mercy seat.

The Ark was placed in the Holy of Holies and it was directly above the ark that God made His glory appear.

Because that is the case God considered the ark to be holy, set apart to Him as a visible reminder of His purity and worth.

[This ark is the main subject of our text this morning **2Samuel 6:1-23**. If we are to hear this text rightly we have to understand that it is more than a golden box with some fancy carvings. We have to understand that the material it is made of and its design are secondary things. We have to understand that the main issue with the ark is the holiness of God. There are at least three lessons this text has for us about holiness. The first is that...]

**Point #1 – Disregarding God’s holiness is dangerous. (1-7)**

Whether it be from ignorance or willful contempt, when a person violates what is sacred they are risking their life.

Verses 1-2 set the scene for us.

From the time of Moses to the time of David lots of stuff happened.

The ark had been captured, most likely the tabernacle had been destroyed, the ark was returned, a whole bunch of people lost their lives because they disobeyed God in their handling of the ark, and so it remained in obscurity for the better part of fifty years according to commentators.

David here, I think, is rightly seeing that the Ark is a tangible representation of the Lord’s presence among the Israelites and now with the country united behind him and the Philistines driven out of the country he believes it is time to bring the Ark to a place of prominence once again.

It is a way of seeing and believing that the LORD is in the midst of His people.

This is how they set out to make that happen (**Verses 3-7**).

Admittedly, at first glance this seems to be an injustice.

Uzzah seems to have good intentions here, he seems to be doing something good by keeping the ark from falling off the cart and what does he get for his good deed? He gets zapped.

Look at verse 7 again it says, “The anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah.”

Why? Because God had set the ark apart, He had said that it was HOLY.

He had given very specific instructions on how to transport it and who should move it and here those instructions are not followed.

*It is hard to imagine Uzzah not being told the story of what happened to the seventy men who failed to respect the holiness of the ark decades before this.*

On top of that we need to consider God’s presence and ability.

Did Uzzah think that God was not aware of what was happening?

Did he think the LORD was too weak to keep the Ark safe?

Even though his intentions were likely good, he acts in unbelief and shows a total disregard for the holiness of God and it costs him his life.

[This is a little bit like fire. How many of you have ever sat around a camp fire? There is something delightful about doing that, but it is only delightful if you respect what it is. Just imagine sitting around a really good campfire with three or four foot flames and somebody accidently drops their wallet in the fire. What is going to happen if they reach in with their bare hand to get it out? They are going to get burned. Is it good to try and save the wallet? Yes! Does that good intention change the nature of the fire? No.]

It is the same here with the holiness of God.

Even though his intentions may be good, he has made the LORD small in his eyes, he fails to appreciate God’s holiness, and it costs him his life.

I fear that is something that is easy for us to fall into.

On this side of the cross most of the tangible reminders of the sacred have passed away.

There is no ark, incense, lampstand, altar, tabernacle, temple, etc...

All of that is fulfilled in Christ and we should be happy for that, but it is an enormous mistake to use God’s grace in Christ to ignore His holiness.

*When Jesus died the temple curtain which shielded the way to the Holy of Holies was torn in two. The way to God was opened.*

Jesus did that so that we might enjoy the holiness of God not so that we can ignore it.

Singing songs to God that could be sung to a romantic interest and no one would know the difference is showing contempt for God’s holiness.

Substituting the bread and wine of communion for potato chips and Pepsi shows a total lack of respect for things that God has set apart as sacred.

Bearing the Name of Jesus and acting worse than an unbeliever is treating the Son Whom God loves like a common doormat.

It is the height of foolishness to think the LORD is indifferent about things like that.

[If we were really thinking rightly we would not be surprised at how God acts towards Uzzah in this text. If we were really thinking rightly we would be surprised it doesn't happen to people all the time. Let us not mistake God's abounding grace for complacency about His Holiness. That would be foolish and dangerous. David in the next few verses shows us a better way forward. He shows us this second lesson, that...]

**Point #2 – Appreciating God's holiness opens the way to blessing and worship. (8-15)**

When we begin to have an appreciation for the infinite perfections and unapproachable majesty of the living God and see that it is no small matter to come into His presence then we will begin to see clearly the way He has made for us to enjoy Him forever.

Verses 8-9 tell us of the emotions that David goes through when Uzzah is struck down by the LORD.

The first emotion we are told about is anger.

There was a good bit to be upset about. A man has died in a parade that was supposed to be a joyful celebration.

It may be that Uzzah was a friend and he is upset at his death.

It is an understandable reaction.

We need to ask ourselves though, "Who is David angry with?"

It is possible he is angry with God. If we are honest that is likely were most of us would start.

How could God do this to Uzzah? How could God do this to me?

It is also possible, as commentator Carl Keil suggests, he is angry with himself.

That fits with what he says in 1Chronicles 15:13, he says, "We did not seek the LORD" concerning how to move the Ark.

We saw last week David earnestly seeking the LORD going out to battle, but here with the holy things of God he is ok with what people think is ok.

It is possible he is blaming himself here and if he is he is right to do it.

In addition to anger verse nine says David is afraid, he is "afraid of the LORD."

That is a very good thing because the Bible tells us that the "Fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom."

He realizes he doesn't know what he is doing, realizes it would be foolish and dangerous to plow ahead, and so instead of going on up to Jerusalem he brings the ark to a guy named Obed-Edom and that is where the ark stayed for three months.

Again the book of 1Chronicles is really helpful here because in that account of this situation we learn that Obed-Edom is a Levite and the Levites are the tribe that God set apart to carry the holy things of the Tabernacle.

Verses 10-12 tell us that the presence of the Ark brought blessing to the house where it was being kept.

The text stops short of giving us specifics but what it does make clear is that the LORD had put some kind of visible sign(s) in place to show everyone, including David, that having this tangible sign of God's presence around was something good.

Yes God's holiness makes Him dangerous to sinners who disregard that, but His presence and favor is also something that we cannot live without.

David gets that and this is what happens in **verses 12b-15**.

Right off the bat we see something different. The ark is carried instead of put on a cart.

God instructions for making the ark included rings be attached just under the lid on the corners so poles could be slid into the rings so the Levites could carry the ark on their shoulders.

Again 1Chronicles gives us more detail here so that we know David went to God's word to do these things the way God said to.

His fear of God's holiness lead him to wisdom.

Notice also he sacrifices an "ox and a fattened animal" after the ark bearers take six steps (I think that is a recognition of the number seven being considered 'holy'.

Think of the creation week and God setting apart the seventh day or look at how prominent the number seven is in Exodus and Leviticus and the bible generally speaking...)

With the sacrifice complete David dances before the LORD in a joyful procession 'wearing a linen ephod' according to the end of verse 15. This is David and his people getting to participate in soul satisfying joyful worship of the living God.

An ephod is a priestly garment. Now David is not a priest. He cannot enter the tabernacle neither does he offer sacrifices by himself.

David needs a priest himself, but wearing this garment teaches something about the role of the king.

As king, David was to act as a representative for his people to God and he is supposed to represent God to his people.

Being an imperfect king who is not a priest David can't be for his people what they really need, but he can do what the LORD intends for him and that is point us to a better King, King Jesus.

Jesus is perfect, He is the King of Kings, and He is also our great high priest.

He doesn't offer the blood of bulls and goat, he offers His own precious blood on our behalf.

He had no need to make atonement for His own sin because He is completely perfect which gives Him the ability to make atonement for us.

[How can we possibly look to Jesus without an appreciation for the holiness of God? How can we look to the horror of the cross and the glory of the empty tomb and think it's no big deal? The work of Christ doesn't change the holiness of God in the smallest degree. Instead it enables us to draw near to the LORD and enjoy His holiness. If we could see that, even just a little bit it would have a big impact on how we come to church. It would have a big impact on how we sing, on how we pay attention, on how we read our bibles, on how we love one another, on how we act at work, on how we treat our families, and on everything in our lives. We can see something of how it impacted David at the end of this chapter and what happens here shows us this third lesson, that...]

**Point #3 – Enjoying God's holiness is good for people, but some will detest it. (16-23)**

Satisfying our souls in the LORD serves those around us in the best possible way, but not everyone likes it.

Let's look together at verses 16-20.

We'll come back in a moment to David's wife Michal, the daughter of Saul, because her reaction acts like literary bookends to verses 17-20.

This time the transporting of the ark ends very differently from the way it ended the first time.

Instead of tragedy it is celebration the whole way.

They arrive at the tent that David set up and place the ark inside.

We are given no details about this tent either here or in Chronicles, but considering the effort David put into getting the other things right it seems likely that he would have had something of similar to the Tabernacle.

Once the ark is in the tent, the king offers a 'burnt offering' and a 'peace offering'.

The burnt offering is an offering of atonement. The one bringing the sacrifice would put his hands on the head of the animal, then the animal would be sacrificed and the priests would carry out a number of duties in regards to the sacrifice.

It is a clear recognition that there is a problem between people and God that needs to be addressed.

The peace offering is a free expression of worship, praise, and thanksgiving according to my bible dictionary and the worshipper was permitted to eat the meat of the sacrifice.

It is a picture of a right relationship with God.

This scene shows us a king with a heart filled with being satisfied in the LORD because he had taken God's holiness seriously.

This is the kind of satisfaction an unbeliever has no clue about.

Look at what he does with his full heart. It says he "blessed the people in the name of the LORD of hosts and distributed among *all* the people, the *whole* multitude of people both men and women, a cake of bread, a portion of meat, and a cake of raisins to each one."

To say that was a massive undertaking and expense is an understatement.

Why does he do it? The most reasonable explanation is that he wants everyone to join in this soul satisfying worship that he is enjoying.

His reverence for the LORD serves the good of those around him.

Look at what it says at the end of verse 19, “Then all the people departed, each to his own house.”

That is a picture of satisfaction and peace in the nation.

*It is an incredible scene, but not everyone is happy.*

We already heard in verse 16 that as David’s wife Michal looked out of the window watching her husband, the king, dance and celebrate before the LORD, “she despised him in here heart.”

When David returns home to ‘bless his own house’ it says in verse 20 that Michal tells him how she feels about the situation. (**Verse 20**)

*It is highly doubtful based on what we read in Chronicles that David was underdressed from a perspective of biblical modesty.*

She is likely meaning here that his actions of leaping and dancing exposed parts of his arms and legs that were not normally visible.

In her opinion he acted in a way that was inappropriate for a king and he did it in front of a bunch of servant girls.

Look at how David responds in **verses 21-23**.

It was the LORD Who has raised David up to be king and it is the LORD who he had concerned himself with in his celebration and worship.

David is quite confident that his heart was right before the LORD that day and he will not be turned away from that because his wife thinks he humiliated himself (more likely she is thinking about her own humiliation).

*Now to be fair to Michal, she has been treated badly in some ways.*

She is David’s first wife and therefore should have been his only wife, but the king had married others.

When David fled for his life, Saul gave her to another man and when David’s throne was established she was taken and given back to him and we have no idea how she felt about that.

She had some legitimate complaints but not about what David did that day. She despises him for his joy in a Holy God who has made provision for His people to be in a relationship with Him.

It is an unfortunate and sad state of affairs for her that seems to continue for the rest of her life.

Sadly, that is the way it is in the world. Even though seeking the LORD first in all things serves the highest good of everyone around us some people will not like it.

[We see this all the time in the Bible don't we. Remember Jeremiah? I was just reading recently about Jeremiah writing a warning to the people to turn back to the LORD. When the scroll is being read to king Jehoiakim every time he gets to the end of a section he has someone cut it off with a knife and throw it in the fire. On top of that they try and arrest Jeremiah and his scribe.]

We see that most on display with Jesus.

He heals and cares for people, He teaches people about God the Father is the most powerful of ways and there are a whole bunch of people that hate Him for it and can't wait to get rid of Him.

He said we should expect the same thing.

Listen, there is nothing better, nothing more loving that we can do for those around us then to delight ourselves in God and pursue, by God's grace, a life of holiness.

Not everyone is going to like that.

People will be offended, people will stop talking to you, people will call you names, and sometimes much worse than that.

Here is what we need to remember in all of that, we need to remember that it is worth it.

*If people think we are weird that is o.k.*

If people don't like us that is o.k.

It's ok because we are looking forward to something much greater than anything people in this life might say or do.

We are looking forward to being in the presence of our God who dwells in unapproachable light because He has made a way for that to happen through His One and only Son Jesus Christ.

Do we have a sense of the holiness of God this morning?

It is dangerous not to brothers and sisters.

It is the only path to blessing and worship.

It is the best way to live even if some people don't like it.

How good it would be if we could all say with full delight, "Holy Is the LORD."