

God is... Holy and Righteous
Psalm 119:137-134, Habakkuk 1:12-13

Well brothers and sisters, last month's TALK Show was an enjoyable change in format – helping us to look at what the Creation reveals to us about God and stretching ourselves to learn how we can experience ordinary mundane activities – like watching a talk show and listening to cheesy jokes and commercial breaks – as actually **worshipping** God. Because that is really the point of our regular Sunday worship services.

We gather together in Jesus' name to encounter and serve God Almighty in such a way that it should... carry into our ordinary everyday activities from Monday to Saturday and transform them and turn them into worship.

The Old Testament prophet Zechariah hints at this transformation of secular into sacred in his prophecy about the Day of the Lord when he says in 14:20-21 *"On that day HOLY TO THE LORD will be inscribed on the bells of the horses, and the cooking pots in the Lord's house will be like the sacred*

bells in front of the altar. Every pot in Jerusalem and Judah will be holy to the Lord Almighty."

And so Zechariah is foreseeing a day when insignificant things like horse bells, and ordinary mundane things like cooking pots, are made Holy to Yahweh Almighty and thus are on equal footing with the very furnishings within the Holy of Holies in the Temple. That's incredible!

Now saying that horse bells and cooking pots will be on par with temple furniture seems rather benign to us – but it's essentially the same as saying that TALK Shows, cheesy jokes, and commercial breaks can be experienced as worship and reveals God to us and serves Him – and for most of us (if we are not acquainted with VV's TALK Show) that doesn't quite feel right... it feels inappropriate.

And so there's really no better place for us this morning, to start looking at the topic of God's Holiness and Righteousness, than by considering what we feel is appropriate or inappropriate for worship. Let me give you an example.

A number of years ago now a couple of lovely ladies at Valleyview invited me to attend a concert with them on a Friday night and I was happy to accompany them and we all enjoyed an evening of country music and each other's company.

However – I brought my trusty decibel meter along with me to measure how loud the music was at this concert because these ladies were a bit concerned about how loud our band was playing during our worship services.

Now as it turned out, the Friday night concert was louder than our Sunday morning services and when I mentioned this the next time the concern about the volume level came up, one of them replied "*well that was a Friday night, this is Sunday morning!*"

Now, if we were to push the issue a bit further and explore why something is appropriate on a Friday night but not on a Sunday morning in worship, the usual explanation offered is

that Sunday is the Lord's Day, God is holy and what we do in worship should reflect that holiness.

Which is correct – but the devil is in the definition of what it means to be "holy" isn't it?

And so the Church has had all sorts of arguments about what kinds of clothes we should wear in worship, or if its appropriate for men to wear a hat in church.

And we've had all sorts of arguments about whether it was appropriate to have guitars in church, and then drums in church... and some people get a bit uncomfortable when a guest speaker or musician comes to lead a service and they have a book or an album that they would like to sell after the service – is that conducting business in church?? Is that appropriate??

And maybe you weren't aware that there was also a fair bit of arguing that went on in the Church over whether it was appropriate to have pipe organs to accompany congregational

singing and whether it was appropriate to conduct a service and have the scriptures available in the common language of the people... and not in Latin.

And all these arguments about what is appropriate for a worship service boil down to what people understand and believe it means that God is Holy.

And I suspect that if I were to ask someone to describe a worship service that is **specifically** focused on and reflects God's holiness, most people would describe it as very slow, solemn, austere, contemplative, and serious, that's the best way to reflect God's holiness.

And that is because we typically think of Holiness as some sort of divine quality that contrasts earthly qualities, like the spirit vs. body, or spiritual vs. physical, austere vs. enjoyable, or contemplative vs. making a joyful noise...

But as we have studied and learned what the scriptures reveal to us about God and his attributes thus far – it should be clear

to us by now, that God's Holiness is not about spiritual vs. physical, or solemn and slow vs. upbeat and fun, or any the other items we that argue are appropriate or inappropriate for a worship service.

The primary meaning of Holiness is God's distinctiveness from what He has created; it is Creator as opposed to creature. God is set apart, separate, and distinct from His creation. That is what the word *Holy* means. As our scripture reading from Habakkuk 1:12 says "*Lord, are you not from everlasting? My God, my Holy One, you will never die.*" This reflects God's uncreatedly infinite, eternal self-existence; and the fact that everything else that exists is not like Him – it all depends on God.

Now, this primary aspect of God's Holiness leads us into a secondary ethical or moral aspect of His Holiness that is very important for us to understand.

If we grasp that God is categorically distinct from what He has created, and created good, in the beginning – then how much

more is God separate and distinct - **Holy** - from that which warps, twists, perverts and uses His good creation to rebel against Him. Thus, Habakkuk continues to speak of God vs. 13 saying *“Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrongdoing.”*

So, the first aspect of God’s Holiness is the Creator vs. Creature distinction, the second aspect of God’s Holiness is His Righteousness vs. Sin.

And if our worship of God is going to reflect His Holiness, it has nothing to do with how loud or soft the music is or what style or genre of music is being played. Our worship is Holy when we do not to idolize anything in our worship services by acting or speaking or using it... as if it is able to cross that Holy gap between creature and Creator and connect us to God. Our worship is Holy when we worship in Jesus’ name because only Jesus is able to connect us with God.

Now, there is a lot more that we could look at with regards to our worship and holiness and what we can and should do in

our worship services – but that is for another time. We need to stay focused on God’s Holiness this morning, because its more important to learn about that first.

And learning about God’s Holiness is taking us on a bit of a winding journey – it started out with worship, turned into a bit of a review of what we’ve already learned about God as Creator, avoided a detour on worship, and now God’s Holiness is leading us into a deeper exploration of His Righteousness. So, yes – there are a few different terms and topics that are being touched on this morning – but just remember, it’s all connected together by God’s Holiness.

Now I don’t know about you, but when I contemplate what makes God Holy and set apart from His creation as uncreated and eternal and infinite and so vastly different from myself – it kind of blows my mind and leaves me awestruck; and that’s good – that’s an appropriate response for us to God’s transcendence.

But brothers and sisters, my prayer for us this morning is that coming to apprehend the second sense of God's Holiness that flows into His Righteousness, all of His pure, uncorrupted, perfect and faithful righteousness would give us a true reckoning of ourselves and we would see in comparison how we are un-righteous.

I'm praying the Holy Spirit would reveal to us how God's righteousness flows out of who He is in all of His Godly perfection and convict us that our unrighteousness stems from our treacherous, fickle, unfaithful sinful hearts.

Coming to realize this is like we are all still early digital picture, 2 megapixel resolution or an early flat screen TV and we are thinking – wow, this is pretty amazing! Look at this resolution and how clean and clear the lines are and how the colors are so vibrant. Man! this is something else this is amazing! But then we turn around and we see a digital pictures at 12 megapixels and a 60" 4K UHD HDR QLED curved screen TV and the resolution and clarity and detail and vibrancy of the color is beyond what we could imagine and what we thought was

simply amazing about ourselves just a second ago now instantly looks shabby and dull. You get what I'm saying??

Or maybe you are pretty accomplished in something, better than average at playing guitar, or football, drawing, dancing, or whatever – you're pretty good at it. And one day while you are doing what you do – you're jamming out playing guitar at a gig and Eddie Van Halen walks in and sits down to listen... you're playing basketball and you look up and notice Michael Jordon is watching you in the stands. You're doing some home renovations, putting up drywall, mudding and taping and painting and in walks Mike Holmes. Suddenly – you're nervous, you don't feel confident or all that accomplished anymore in the presence of these people.

And it doesn't even have to be someone famous does it – we all have that one person, who for whatever reason, just makes us feel insecure about ourselves, like we don't measure up or have what it takes and we ought to do better with who we are.

These are not pleasant experiences – but brothers and sisters, if we truly apprehend God’s Holy Righteousness, we cannot but see ourselves as unworthy by comparison and convicted for it.

Why? Well let’s look at our second scripture reading this morning; Psalm 119:137-138, and it says *“You are righteous, Lord, and your laws are right. The statutes you have laid down are righteous; they are fully trustworthy.”*

This verse, and many other verses in the scriptures highlight that righteousness is all about conforming to a standard, rigorously adhering to the Law – and if scripture tells us that God is righteous and His laws are righteous, then we can conclude that God has no problems in keeping His own Law. In fact, since there is nothing that exists outside of God, no source of power, or knowledge or standard of goodness, He himself is the source of whatever laws He puts into place.

So we can say that God’s Law is God Himself – and God is absolutely perfectly righteous in living up to every bit of who

He is! Its not just that God is fully consistent in his character – but He establishes a perfect morality, an ultimate ethical aspect as He is... obedient to Himself as He is Law.

And as God reveals Himself to us, we see this about Him – this righteousness to His own Law – and as we understand it, it becomes beautiful to us. We won’t see it in a legalistic kind of way that we are so prone to connect with the Law because of what we see in the N.T. No – God is meticulously faithful to keeping His Law, His WORD, and its good.

This is why all throughout Ps 119 the writer is stating *“I delight in your law, I love your law”* Because the Psalmist knows that God’s Law is God and God is beautiful in how He keeps His Law, how He is faithful to it – to Himself.

And thank goodness He is! Because every bit of our existence, of reality’s existence depends on it! We’ve never had to deal with a situation like waking up to discover that uh-oh!! Physics isn’t working this morning... I guess God didn’t feel like

keeping His Law, hopefully He'll change His mind and we'll be able to have gravity again soon! Preferably before breakfast??

But beyond the simple self-interested pragmatism that can make us thankful for God's righteousness, I pray my limited attempts to describe God's righteousness this morning will result in us being captivated by the beauty and the joy and the delight and the rightness that is revealed to us in God keeping His Law, being fully consistent in who He is, and being convicted by the moral perfection that is in His living up to being... God.

Do we not have a small taste of this ourselves when we are doing what we believe we are meant to do? When we boast – nothing but net - and then pull it off, swish! That satisfaction when we can make good on promises – being a man of my word. Even as sin twists and warps us, its still there, how else is it possible for Frank Sinatra to sing so passionately about living life consistently – even if it is all on his own terms - I did it my way.

May the Holy Spirit open our hearts to see this glorious truth about God and how good and amazing and awesome and convicting it is that He is Righteous.

And as this happens brothers and sisters, we are compelled to respond. If we are saved in Jesus Christ, we will begin to understand that our relationship with God was designed to be one where we respond in faithfulness to who God is, to His Law, just as He is faithful to Himself and His Law. And we do this we are being righteous and growing in righteousness.

We will experience our own joy and delight, and God's joy and delight, that we are living up to who He created us to be in His image, and also that we are responding appropriately to who He is in all His perfections, in all His Righteousness.

Let me give you a few more insights about God's righteousness and His Law that I pray the Holy Spirit will use to help us become attracted to Him, delight in His Law, be convicted of our unrighteousness, and set us up to put our faith in Christ's righteousness.

Knowing God and delighting in His Law does not mean we have to be afraid that we will have a strict legalistic relationship with Him, which is impersonal and severe and scrupulous, especially if we are in Christ.

Think about what its like to play games and sports, there is fun, playfulness, creativity and so on – but it all takes place with in the rules of the game, right? Christ doesn't save us from God's Law – He sanctifies us so that His Law becomes a delight for us and we relate to Him in and through that Law.

And here's something else about God and His righteousness that can help us get away from the negative, legalistic view of the law and really embrace the Spirit of Ps 119 that loves God's law and delights in it.

Consider this... In His faithfulness to Himself... God's Spirit is always right. That is to say His Spirit wants, desires to be who God is and keep His Word. God's Spirit is always in accord with His Word. God's Spirit never degenerates into a different spirit that resents His Word, feels constricted by His Law, and

tries to find loopholes to get around it to pursue a different goal than what His Law points to – or grudgingly fulfils it merely as a duty or obligation. We're like that because of sin, but God is not.

Brothers and sisters, if we think God's Law is something Jesus frees us from, that it's negative, that its just so many rules, it's legalistic and a burden we can't live up to and so on – that only reflects who we really are in contrast to God's righteousness. That just reveals our un-righteousness.

Let's go back to our example of games and sports. When both participants in a game have a "sporting" spirit – the rules are helpful and great and facilitate the game, but when one or both participants have a bad spirit, it changes things doesn't it. Even if they follow the rules something is different isn't it, and the game is no longer pleasant or sporting. So whatever negative perception or experiences we have with God's Law... it doesn't come from God, or from His Law – it comes from our own un-righteousness, because our spirit is not right, our spirit is affected by Sin – and the Law only points that out.

Our sinful spirit that wants to place ourselves on par with being God – at least in the capacity to be the Law unto ourselves and be self-determining as God is. I did it my way. And thus our un-righteousness is a rightness that comes from our self, it is self-righteousness.

But even in our self-righteousness we are betrayed by our fickleness and unfaithfulness. We can't even keep to our own self-determined standards can we... when we are 18 we're hard-core, gangsta for life!! when we are 25 we're married settled down with kids and mini-van. When we're 55 we're having a mid-life crisis and breaking our marriage vows, not to mention all the new year's resolutions we've failed to keep.

Even without sin in the picture, by our very created nature as humans who are born, and grow, and learn and mature it is impossible for us to be fully consistent and perfect in who we are like an eternal, infinite, self-existing God who always was, is, and will be.

Brothers and sisters, are you starting to see God's amazing righteousness in such a way that it is exposing your own unrighteousness? I'm praying that it would be so.

We can't receive a true revelation of who God is without having it change how we see ourselves by comparison – and in the case of God's righteousness – by conviction. This is why the Psalmist writes in 119:141 *"Though I am lowly and despised..."* He is convicted of where He stands before God, before God's Law in his own un-righteousness.

But here's the good news, a true revelation of God, true apprehension of who God is overcomes our sinful tendency to despair in our un-righteousness. Even though the psalmist is lowly and despised his next words are *"I do not forget your precepts."*

Why? Because the beauty of God revealed to us in His own perfect obedience to Himself, gives hope because God's Law reveals that He fully obedient to His promise to forgive our sin.

Listen to who God proclaims Himself to be when He gives His Law to Moses in Ex 34:6-7 *“Yahweh, Yahweh, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished...”*

Brothers and sisters, God is fully 100% faithful to being a gracious God, slow to anger and being a compassionate God. He fully lives up to this Law for Himself, He keeps it scrupulously, to the point that He is willing to pay all the accumulated debt that it will cost to be this forgiving God – offering His only Son as a sacrifice, but that’s getting ahead of ourselves on that last part about *“not leaving the guilty unpunished.”*

This morning, its all about apprehending God’s Holiness as the transcendent Creator, who through His Righteousness is also separate from Sin, so that we see God for who He is and we see ourselves for who we are and I’m trusting the Lord has revealed this to you through this message today.

Because that will prepare us for the Holy Spirit to confront us with the third aspect of God’s Holiness next week, that God **must** respond to our unrighteousness, our violations of His Law, our rebellion against Him as Creator. In His faithfulness to Himself He cannot overlook it, thus that last line... *“He does not leave the guilty unpunished.”*

And if we have begun to get a sense of what God’s Holiness and His Righteousness are all about, then we are prepared to face that which we would prefer to avoid - God’s Justice.

So – a bit of cliff hanger ending this morning... God is Holy and Righteous, that means He is 100% faithful in being a gracious and forgiving God and yet... He does not leave the guilty unpunished – what implications does that have for us? Make sure you are here next week to find out!

Let’s pray.