

## Session 1

July 16, 2023

### SET APART: THE HOLINESS OF GOD

#### Psalm 99:1-9

In popular usage, the word *holy* is often misused to mean “pure.” But the word means so much more than that. It shares a root with the word *sanctified*, as well as the word *saint*. To be *sanctified* is to be set apart. To be a *saint*, is to be a saved; set apart by God’s grace for God’s purpose. Hence, holy means just that: *set apart for a divine purpose*. No example demonstrates this principle more clearly than the person of God Himself, whose central attribute is holiness. In this week’s text, the psalmist indicated three ways that God demonstrates His *set apart-ness*.

**God is Holy in His reigning (vv. 1-3).** The very fact that the Lord reigns over everything indicates He is apart from everything. This is often referred to as His *transcendence*, or “other-world-ness,” as I like to call it. He is like us...but not really! We are on *this* side. He is on the *other* side. Here, the psalmist points out three ways that we know He is holy. First, the people *revere* Him (v. 1). The word *tremble* means to quiver; in either rage, or excitement, or both. Those who are His enemies tremble in rage. They have no recourse against Him! Those who belong to Him tremble in excitement. They are witnesses of His glory and His power. Second, the angels *respect* Him (v. 1). The *cherubim* are angelic beings who most often resemble men. They generally act as God’s messengers. But the word is used here more generically (or poetically). The Lord is enthroned *above* them. In other words, the angels gather at the foot of His throne. He is set apart from people (see v. 2), but He is also set apart from the angels. Third, creation *reacts* to Him. Whether in the storms of the land, or the waves of the seas, or the breaking of the rocks, creation always responds to the Creator. Here, the word picture is clear. Just as the people *tremble*, the earth *quakes*. For reflection: *What does His “name” (v. 3) refer to? Why do you think the psalmist said to praise His name rather than simply praise God Himself?*

**God is holy in his righteousness (vv. 4-5).** That His throne is established in the heavens, and He is reigning makes Him a King. Here, He is the *mighty* King. The older translations render it literally, “The King’s strength...,” but the modern translation is better, based on the two emphatic affirmations that follow it: “*You* have established fairness; *You* have administered justice...” Notice that the mighty King doesn’t simply dole out judgments. Rather He *loves* justice (v. 4), and, as a result of that love, established fairness and administered justice in Jacob (which is another name for Israel). That sets the God of Israel apart from the other nations. For reflection: *No human king can always be right, always be fair, and always be just. Yet our God is! For this reason, He should be exalted and worshipped (v. 5).*

**God is holy in His relations (vv. 6-9).** Much of the adoration toward the Lord in the Old Testament was based on the miracles He performed, especially during the formative years of the Exodus. Such things as the parting of the sea and the turning of bitter water into sweet were continually rehearsed before the people. Moses and Aaron (v. 6) were prominent leaders who mediated between God and Israel. Samuel was also a hero of the faith who played the role of a prophet, a priest, and a judge. All called out to the Lord, and all were answered by Him. Besides that, the Lord forgave them (and the nation they represented) when they failed to keep all the

decrees and statutes they had been entrusted with. This sets the Lord apart. He is faithful to His people even when they are not faithful to Him. For reflection: *Notice the flow of each stanza. (1) Each contains a teaching statement; (2) Each shifts the pronouns from third person (He) to the second person (You), and (3) each ends with the main point of the psalm: He is Holy!*