

HOLY LEADERSHIP
Third in a Lenten Series: The Holiness of God
March 8, 2015 –2 Corinthians 4: 1-7
The Church of the Covenant

The high priest in ancient Israel could enter into the presence of a Holy, Holy, Holy God only once per year and that on the Day of Atonement. He would prepare for days in advance –offering blood sacrifice and being covered with the blood of that sacrifice. Before He could enter into the Temple itself and long before He could enter into the Holy of Holies, the place where the Jews believed God literally dwelt in the Temple in Jerusalem, he would ritualistically wash himself, sacred ablutions, in “living water”, water that was running, not stagnant, in order to become ritualistically clean. (See generally, “In the Shadow of the Temple”, Oskar Skarssaune, chapter 18) He would fast and pray. If for whatever reason there was even one blot of sin upon him, upon entry into the Holy of Holies, he would be struck dead by the holiness of God. Holiness and un-holiness cannot be in the same space at the same time; they are utterly incompatible. So on the Day of Atonement the high priest would be covered with the blood of the sacrifice, part the veil separating the Holy of Holies from the rest of the Temple, and with great care and trepidation enter into the presence of a Holy, Holy, Holy God. They would tie a stout cord to his one leg. Because the fear was if he were struck dead by the holiness of God, how were they to retrieve the dead body, which was itself ritualistically unclean, and who else would dare to enter into the space where the high priest had just been struck down by God’s holiness? So the rope would be used to drag the dead body of the high priest out of the Holy of Holies were that to become necessary. Then the high priest would offer a blood sacrifice in the presence of the Holy, Holy, Holy God for the sins of the people, God would become “at one” with His covenant people once again, and the careful balance between God’s holiness and the people’s un-holiness would be restored. As we go deeper into the matter of God’s holiness I just say, beloved, tie a rope on me; for everyone who serves the Living God needs a safety line! (I digress for a moment –and ask the impertinent question, what did any of us do this morning to prepare ourselves for the privilege of entering into the presence of a Holy, Holy, Holy God in worship? Did we read the text in advance? Did we study? Did we fast or pray? Did we prepare our heart and mind? Exactly. And then we wonder why there is so little holy power in the church.) I ask again the question I am posing in Lent –how can a sinful, unholy imperfect people enter into the presence of the Holy, Holy, Holy, thrice Holy, perfectly Holy God???????

As Christian leaders how do we say we minister in the name of the One True and Living God? How does this not come off as utter hypocrisy? How do we maintain the high standards of holiness and not dumb them down to lowest common denominators of our culture? How do we preach about and proclaim God’s holiness that we cannot hope to achieve ourselves in this life? How do we point beyond ourselves to something, someONE, who is wholly other, completely separate, set apart from anything we can attempt to explain? How do we, like the high priest of old, with some fear and trepidation, seek to enter into the presence of a Holy God? The Holiness Code from Leviticus requires priests to be “*Holy to their God*” *HOLY UNTO GOD (Leviticus 21: 6)* Ministers, Pastors, elders, deacons, and now, please remember Protestants, we believe in the “Priesthood of all believers” that every man and every woman is a priest of the Holy God. We are all priests *HOLY UNTO GOD* now seeking to enter into His presence.

Our Bible verses from 2 Corinthians chapter 4 are helpful. It speaks of a ‘*veiled gospel*’ (v. 3) that there is still a separation between the unholy God and the world and that the world cannot see nor experience the Good News on its own, apart from God. The veil separates them from seeing the GLORY of God, the light of the presence of God’s holiness, the radiant light that beams from His Holy presence. And God’s light has shone into our hearts as we enter into His presence, “*Let light shine out of*

darkness”, as we worship and study and pray and serve, the light shines more and more into our heart. The more we enter into God’s Holy, Holy, Holy presence the more we become like Him and the less we become like our world. And just as Moses’ face shone with the glory and light of God when he entered into God’s presence on the mountaintop, so does our face shine as we enter into God’s presence. We see the *“glory of God in the face of Christ”* (v. 6) As we see our Savior face-to-face, as the Bible says, we become transformed, we become conformed to Him and not to this world, we become re-created in His image and not the image of this world. Then it says, *“We have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us.”* (2 Corinthians 4: 7) God is holiness, Spirit, Living Water and power; we are not. We are just the earthen vessels, the cracked pots, the broken terra cotta pipes that God uses to pour out His holiness, Spirit and power out into His creation. The transcendent power is not ours; it is God’s. The holiness is not ours; it is God’s. I always like to say, if you see something good at the church, give God the credit; if you see something you don’t like, give me the credit. Don’t credit the earthen vessel with the transcendent power; don’t confuse the two. Don’t expect the church to be perfect; it isn’t; we aren’t. Only God is HOLY. We are not.

HOLY LEADERSHIP is positioning ourselves in a place to enter into the presence of a Holy God. The more we **worship**, the more we enter into God’s presence and the more we enter into His holiness, the more we become like Him. The more we **study** about God and His Son, Jesus Christ, the more we enter into God’s presence and the more we enter into His holiness and the more we become like Him. The more we **pray** and speak with the Holy God, the more we enter into His presence and holiness and the more we become like Him. The more we **serve** and do mission in His name the more we enter into His presence, the more we rub into His holiness and the more we become like Him. We become like the thing we worship, study, speak to and serve. The more time we spend in the presence of a Holy God the more we fit our heart for heaven in that day when we will stand in the presence of a Holy, Holy, Holy God—entering into the Holy of Holies in heaven, having the books of our lives opened to His holiness, giving an account for our life and how we spent it. And I think some folks are going to be truly shocked in that day when they enter into the presence of God’s holiness. They’ll dust off their litanies of excuses—God, I basically believe in you so you have to let me in. Lord, I’m basically a good person, better than most, you have to grant me eternal life. I worshipped you on the golf course. I experienced you in nature. I prayed while I drove my car (Beloved if you cannot text and drive you cannot enter into God’s presence and drive!) I was awfully busy on the Sabbath, too busy to worship, too distracted to take time to know You by studying Your Word. Its just the way the world is.-- to which the Holy God responds: **“You never spent any time in my Holy presence in this life—why would you want to spend time in my holy presence FOR ALL ETERNITY?????”** Maybe no one ever told you this before. But the reason why we express our HOLY LEADERSHIP in worship and study, prayer and service, is because we are fitting our souls for heaven, to enter into the presence of a Holy God in this life, is to make our souls ready to enter into the presence of a Holy God in the life to come. Ministers who do not pray; elders who do not study; deacons who do not worship; the priesthood of all believers who choose not to enter into the presence of a Holy God. Is it any wonder the church lacks spiritual power today???? Earthen vessels, got to enter into the presence of a Holy God in order to have the transcendent power be at work in us.

In the 29th chapter of Exodus it recounts how Aaron, Moses’ brother and the first high priest, and the priests were to be ordained and made “Holy to the Lord.” There was the washing of water. There was the shedding of much blood. They were bathed in water and they were bathed in blood. The blood of bulls and goats and lambs shed that Aaron might enter into the presence of a Holy God. That He might be consecrated HOLY UNTO GOD. But there is something more powerful than the washing of mere water. There is a blood more spiritually powerful than that of any animal. What all the mere water and all the mere blood could never hope to wash away, has been made manifest now. How do we as the

priesthood of all believers now enter into the presence of a Holy, Holy, Holy, thrice Holy, perfectly Holy God? How do we enter in and not be struck down by our own sinful nature? How do we as imperfect, un-holy earthen vessels hold the holiness and transcendent power of a Holy God within? Just have to come back next week to find out. Amen.

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IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ON TO A FRIEND!*