

Words create images. Those images trigger certain feelings within us. Ask our kids or teenagers just now what they feel when they hear the words: “summer vacation.” What do you feel when I say the word “job”... “lunch”... “ice cream”? Even people’s names trigger feelings in us: “Osama bin Laden”... “George W. Bush...” “Lebron James.” Bible words create images that trigger feelings, too – “cross”... “shepherd”... “heaven”... “grace.” Sometimes we have certain experiences in life – positive or negative - that create certain feelings that we then associate with certain words.

I have to confess that when I hear the words “holiness” or “sanctification”, my first reaction is negative. It’s because of my background. I grew up in a spiritual climate where the word “holiness” was used a lot. I came to identify it with a very strict, somewhat arbitrary list of do’s and don’ts. For some reason, when I hear the word “holy” or “holiness” the first visual image I have is of a red-faced preacher in a bad suit yelling at me or a frumpy church lady in a large, floral patterned dress scolding me. I must admit that when I first hear the word “holiness” or “holy”, I associate it with a certain kind of attitude: holier-than-thou... a suffocating self-righteousness... a Gestapo-like interest in other people’s behavior... an air of spiritual superiority. Imagine my anxiety when I first discovered that one of God’s names is Yahweh – M’Kaddesh – “I am the LORD who makes you holy” or “I am the LORD who sanctifies you.”

Over the years I’ve had to let the Lord gradually change my feelings when it comes to holiness. I began to realize that Jesus was holy in every sense of that word; nevertheless, very sinful, unholy people were drawn to him like bugs to the light while many religious folk had a spiritually allergic reaction to Him. Let’s read our text for today. The book of Leviticus is all about holiness. If the people of Israel were going to enjoy a relationship with Yahweh they had to become holy, stay holy and be holy. Yahweh M’Kaddesh – “I am the LORD who makes you holy.” These messages are about what these different names for God reveal about Him. Each name tells us something important about God. Each name reveals something that we aren’t. None of us start out holy. So why is being holy such a big deal to God? Why is it so important to God that you become holy? And how does the Lord make you holy?

### **WHY SHOULD YOU BECOME HOLY?**

The first reason is that holiness is a mark of ownership by the Lord. If we took the time to look at the roots of both the Hebrew and Greek words for holiness, we’d discover they refer to objects or people who are set apart for the exclusive use of a god. In the Old Testament, the people of Israel were given a very elaborate form of worship. As such, all sorts of utensils were used – bowls, thongs, cups and dishes. All these items were considered holy. That didn’t mean all these things were somehow morally upright; it meant, instead, that they were set apart for the exclusive worship of the Lord. You didn’t use these items to eat your dinner on or wash your clothes in. Holiness conveyed the idea of ownership – of objects and of people.

A holy person is first and foremost someone who is set apart for and owned by the Lord. If you're a follower of Jesus today, He owns you. You've been set apart for the Lord – to enjoy a unique, special relationship with Him. You find this assumption in many places in the Bible. For instance, we read: “Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price (there's very clearly the idea of ownership). So you must honor God with your body.” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20 NLT)

There's a very obvious implication here. If you're owned by the Lord – if you belong to Him – then every conceivable area of your life is under His Lordship. Being holy starts with recognizing that Yahweh is your Boss at home and at work, on Sunday morning here at church, on Tuesday afternoon at your place of work and on Friday night when you go out with friends to relax. Even the word “boss” is too weak. He's your Master and you're His slave. Every relationship, every decision, every dollar is under His jurisdiction. Realize that the Lord always wants to claim new territory in your life – territory that belongs to Him by right but which you're withholding from Him. This month it might be your temper. Next year it might be how you use money. Five years from now, it might be your tendency to manipulate people. God wants all of you because He wants you to be holy. To be holy is to be totally owned by the Lord Himself.

Why should you become holy? Secondly, holiness is a mark of family resemblance to the Lord. Yahweh wants you to be holy because He is holy – that is what He is. Author A.W. Tozer wrote, “Holy is the way God is. To be holy he does not conform to a standard. He is that standard. He is absolutely holy with an infinite, incomprehensible fullness of purity that is incapable of being other than it is.” The holiness of God is so absolute and total that none of us can begin to appreciate it. In God there is not even the smallest particle of evil, wickedness or spiritual darkness. I've always been awed by the biblical accounts of when someone came into the actual presence of God. They fell on their faces before God often wanting to get away from Him or being filled with a sense of dread because His purity was so incredibly awesome. Without exception, each person was overwhelmed by God's holiness often depicted as a blinding light.

Once a little girl visited a beautiful cathedral with her aunt. It was late afternoon and the sun's rays were streaming through a stained glass window that featured the figures of several saints. The little girl pointed to the figures standing out in the strong light and asked, “Who's that?” Her aunt replied, “That's St. Peter.” Then the girl pointed to another and asked, “Who's that?” “St. John,” was the answer. “And that one?” “That's St. James.” With a sigh of satisfaction, the little girl said, “Well, now I know what a saint is. A saint is somebody the light shines through.” If you're a follower of Jesus, people just see the family resemblance. The Light of the world shines through you.

The Bible doesn't say, “Be holy in exactly the same way I am holy.” Instead, the Bible says, “For I am the LORD your God. You must consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy.” (Leviticus 11:44 NLT) What's the difference? God can't give you His absolute holiness, but He can and does share a derived holiness with His angels in heaven and with those of us here on earth that He's claimed as His own children. Your

kids don't look exactly like you, but they often resemble you to a remarkable degree. You're called to resemble the character of your heavenly Father and that likeness can and should become more pronounced as you grow in holiness. God wants you to look like you belong to His family.

Why should you become holy? Thirdly, holiness is the mark of wholeness before the Lord. Holiness brings health and wholeness into your life in every way. Our English word "holy" is derived from a word that means "whole, complete, well." Everyone here today suffers from character or personality traits that may not appear to be sinful and yet they're spiritually unhealthy. Some of us struggle with poor self-esteem. Holiness is coming to see yourself as God sees you – a creature of infinite worth. Some of us are fearful and insecure. Holiness is being able to approach life with a proper sense of confidence because the God of the Universe lives in you. Some of us have battles with chronic anxiety. Holiness means learning how to rule your fears and not be ruled by them. Some of us continue to be powerfully and negatively influenced by painful events in our past. Holiness is about being free of the past's tyranny and learning how to live fully and freely in the present. God hates anything and everything that causes any kind of spiritual dysfunction in your life much like a mother hates any kind of illness that threatens her child. God wants you to be spiritually healthy because that's holiness.

Have you ever seen Mt. Rushmore? Guston Borglum carved those massive figures of four American presidents – Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt – into that mountain in South Dakota. When he was asked about his amazing work, he replied, "Those figures were there for 40 million years. All I had to do was dynamite 400,000 tons of granite to bring them into view." Yahweh M'Kaddesh is doing that right now in you and me. He's chipping away here and carving out there – and sometimes even blowing some stuff up in us – in order to create in you and me an eternal character that is the mark of His ownership, that resembles His character and that is in every way whole and healthy. Now here's the second question.

## **HOW DO YOU BECOME HOLY?**

Please notice right away that the answer is found in God's name. He is Yahweh – M'Kaddesh – "I am the LORD who makes you holy." The Lord Himself is the One who takes the ultimate responsibility to make you and me holy. But how does He do it? Let me suggest two answers to this question. First, the Lord imputes holiness to you. In other words, He just gives holiness to you instantly at the moment of the Holy Spirit's entry into your life. At the moment you receive Jesus as your Savior and the Holy Spirit comes into your life, God declares you holy. A remarkable exchange occurs. Your sins are actually imputed, given or put into Jesus. At the same time, God imputes, gives and puts the perfect holiness and goodness of Jesus into you. This explains why many Bible passages speak of holiness as something that happened in the past. For instance, Paul, the apostle, writes, "I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy (past tense) by means of Christ Jesus, just as he did for all people everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ..." (1 Corinthians 1:2 NLT). Again, "...But you were cleansed;

you were made holy (past tense); you were made right with God by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” (1 Corinthians 6:11 NLT)

Now, when you think about it, God has to do this if you’re going to be able to have any kind of relationship with Him. God is absolute holiness. Not even the smallest particle of evil or sinfulness can exist in His presence. How, then, can you or I – sinful as we are – ever have any access to God? Here’s one way to think of it. You’ve heard of rose-tinted glasses? When you look through them, everything has a reddish color or tint. When God looks at you, He sees you through Christ-tinted glasses, so to speak. At all times, He sees you in Jesus. At all times, Jesus’ perfection and goodness is being applied to you and given to you. The first way you become holy is simply the result of something God does that you are probably not even aware of when it happens. Yahweh – M’Kaddesh gives you holiness instantly at the moment of spiritual rebirth.

How do you become holy? There’s a second answer to that question. The Lord imparts holiness to you. He works holiness into you gradually through the Holy Spirit’s indwelling of your life. God isn’t content to look at you only through Christ-tinted glasses. Holiness is referred to as a past event in the Bible – you are made holy – but it’s also spoken of as something going on right now in the present and completed in the future. The Bible says, “God’s will is for you to be holy (something not fully accomplished yet).... (1 Thessalonians 4:3 NLT). “Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy (future tense) and without fault in his eyes.” (Ephesians 1:4 NLT) Referring to what Jesus did on the cross, we read, “For by that one offering he forever made perfect those who are being made holy (it’s happening now and will be completed in the future).” (Hebrews 10:14 NLT) That old bumper sticker is pretty good theology in the end: “Be patient; God is not finished with me yet.” Yahweh –M’Kaddesh imputes holiness instantly, but He also imparts it gradually.

There’s three important implications I want you to remember. One, there are no exceptions to holiness. Yahweh –M’Kaddesh is relentless. When He takes it upon Himself to work holiness into your life, He will leave no place unchallenged. Through His Word, through other people and through heartaches in life, He goes after every area in your life. Some of it will feel painful. Why? Because He’ll go after every secret sin, every proud thought and every unhealthy character trait. Some of it will be feel great. Why? Because in every experience, He will give you His grace, increase your knowledge of Him and show you how much He values you. No exceptions to holiness.

Two, there are no excuses for disobedience. Yahweh –M’Kaddesh will put His finger on an area of your life and say, in effect: “This has to go. This has to change. This must become well.” Then you have a choice before you: obey or disobey. Our text starts out “Consecrate yourselves and be holy...” (Leviticus 20:7 NIV) That word “consecrate” is the verbal form of *kaddesh* – the same word translated as “holy.” You might translate that verse, “Make up your mind to be holy and then be holy.” To consecrate yourself to the Lord means to make up your mind that you do belong to the Lord and that in every area of your life you will reflect that reality. God will give you the Holy Spirit to empower you to obey Him, but He will not obey for you. Not only is God relentless, He can also

be ruthless. He will do whatever He needs to do to bring you to a place of obedience. He can and will allow hardship, failure and disappointment into your life if you insist on disobedience. I have a friend who said something I like very much, "I'm perfectly willing to compromise, but God always wants it His own way." No excuses for disobedience.

A woman was visiting Switzerland and came upon a shepherd with his sheep. Over to the side on a clump of hay lay one of his sheep obviously in discomfort, in real pain. "What's wrong with that sheep?" she asked. "His leg is broken," the shepherd replied. "How did he break it?" "I broke it," he told her. "You broke it?!" "Yes." "Why did you break it?" The shepherd explained. "He's the most wayward sheep I have. He has real leadership and the others were following him right up to the brink of a cliff and almost falling over it. He never obeyed me. So I broke his leg and put him on the hay. The next day I came to him to feed him and he tried to bite me. I waited two days and then I returned with some food. He ate it all and licked my hands – the first time since his birth." The woman still had questions, "So, why did you do that?" The shepherd said, "Because from now on, he will be the most obedient sheep in my flock. He will take my word seriously. He will love me and remember that I healed him from his pain. He will remember that he is to obey me." Likewise, God will do what God needs to do.

No exceptions to holiness. No excuses for disobedience. But the third implication is the best one of the three. There are no reasons for discouragement. What God starts, God finishes. Becoming holy is not up you to you ultimately; it's in the hands of your loving Father. And because He is a loving Father, you can trust Him to do His work in your life at a rate that is ideally suited for you. He will raise each issue when it needs to be raised inviting you to repent, to grow or to change as the case may be. I'm very grateful that Yahweh - M'Kaddesh doesn't show me all at once the stuff in my life that needs to be made holy and expect me to deal with it all at once. I'd be overwhelmed! The Bible says, "...Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him." (Philippians 2:12-13 NLT) No reasons for discouragement.

The ceiling of the Sistine Chapel is one of the greatest artistic triumphs in history. From 1508 to 1512, the artist Michelangelo lay on his back and painted. But Michelangelo's magnificent art started to fade almost immediately. Within a century of completing his work, no one remembered what his original frescoes had really looked like. One painter said, "We see the colors of the Sistine ceiling as if through smoked glass." In 1981 a scaffold was erected to clean the frescoes. With a special solution, Fabrizio Mancinelli and Gianluigi Colalucci gently washed a small corner of the painting. They invited art experts to examine the work. The result was stunning. No one had imagined that beneath centuries of grime lay such vibrant colors. This was not the Michelangelo known by art critics. This artist was clearly the master of form - his paintings resembling sculpture more than painting. This artist was also the master of color - azure, green, rose, and lavender of amazing nuance. Their success prompted the restoration of the entire ceiling. The task was completed on December 31, 1989. It took twice as long to clean the ceiling as Michelangelo needed to paint it. But the result was breathtaking.

For the first time in nearly 500 years, people viewed this masterpiece the way it was intended, in all of its color and beauty.

One day in heaven the entire universe will see you as the masterpiece God always intended. “Now may the God of peace make you holy in every way....” (1 Thessalonians 5:23 NLT) And He will, brothers and sisters, because His name is Yahweh – M’Kaddesh: “I am the LORD who makes you holy.”