**Journey of Holiness**

**Chapter 1**

This month we are doing a series on the *Journey Towards Holiness*. We are studying a book by Alan Kreider, which gives a broad perspective on holiness, reminding us as God’s people that we are made holy. Heb 2:11 says, “*Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So, Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers.”* This study is not just about personal Christian behaviour, but we are drawn to worship God and urged to live out His love in society.

Firstly, holiness is not a pious distraction from the task of serving Jesus Christ in the world. We cannot separate the inner life with God from the outer life of obedient action, or separate our relationship with him from our relationship with our fellow humans. Yes, we will apply holiness to our deepest needs for provision and protection, that can be met only in the love of God. But we want to link our personal experience with God, to the purposes of God in the world. In the past the church in South Africa has been so guilty of seeing holiness as personal and not social. When we allow that separation, we make the gospel ineffective and irrelevant to the world.

Let’s look at the Israelites at the Red Sea in Egypt, with the enemy chasing them, and then the sea parting to allow them to pass through. It swallowed their pursuers, and they saw the awesome power of God; and then sang the song of victory, *“The Lord is a warrior; the Lord is his name … Who among the gods is like you, O Lord? Who is like you - majestic in* *holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders? ... In your unfailing love you will lead the people you have redeemed. In your strength you will guide them to your holy dwelling … You will bring them in and plant them on the mountain of your inheritance – the place, O Lord, you made for your dwelling, the sanctuary, O Lord, your hands established.”* Ex 15. This was the beginning of a journey which set them apart from the Egyptians, and from all peoples. This holiness would require them to go on living with risk, trusting in their Deliverer for their protection and provision, as they eventually invaded the Promised Land.

Then another picture is when Isaiah was in the temple 500 years later, at a time of political crisis, when their kings were doing what was evil in the sight of the Lord. King Uzziah had just died and the enemy forces were building up and would devastate them. Suddenly Isaiah saw the Lord, and angels flying and calling to one another, “*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty, the whole earth is full of his glory.”* Isaiah 6:3. The place was shaken and filled with smoke. *“Woe to me!”* he cried, *“I am ruined!”* He knew he was a sinner, unable to enter into the angels’ song, with unclean lips, or to speak to the political situation of his time. The angel took a coal from the altar and touched his lips and Isaiah’s sin was forgiven, his unclean lips became holy, fit to be a mouthpiece for the message of the King to his people, “*Here I am. Send me!”* he said. His word to God’s people was one of warning, because they had forgotten their calling to be a holy nation, not trusting “*the Holy God, who will shows himself holy by his righteousness”* to protect and provide for them. (5:16)

We see in these 2 stories that God was showing something of himself, and his people came to call his reality “*holiness*” and they called Him “*the Holy God*”. They responded in awe and worship. We see that as the people experienced his holiness, God invaded their lives and their communities. God began to change them. Their lifestyles became different from the ways of other people, and bore the stamp of the Holy One. By living a life of holy difference, they came to *“share in his holiness*”, as Heb 12:10 says. Holiness was not static, but dynamic, as God propelled them into a new kind of living that was risky. Even if they were led into situations of uncertainty or danger, they would survive only if they kept trusting in the everyday grace of God.

God grieves as he sees how we humans suffer, because we have distorted his creation. Jesus wept over the Holy City of Jerusalem, because they did not recognise him as the Messiah. But God is determined to restore what man has spoiled. Salvation is not simply bringing us into heaven, but as Revelation shows, he is “*making everything new”* (Rev 21:5) Now the Holy God invites you and me to be fellow walkers on this road. But where does it go? God is leading his people to a Holy City – a holy social order, where suffering and death will be no more. The Holy God lives in the holy city, and by its river there is a tree of life, with fruit that heals the nations. And throughout the city, as creatures respond to their Creator and Re-creator, there is worship. This Holy City lets us see how huge, how life-embracing, how beautiful, holiness is. It also helps us put our lives into perspective of God’s big project – which aims at nothing less than a “*new creation*”, a reconciliation of all things, in Christ Jesus. Wolves and lambs will live side by side. God will make everything whole on that Day when his Son, Jesus Christ, will return in judgement and mercy. In the meantime creation groans as in the act of giving birth, yet we know, God is in control. And since the Holy City would be a holy city, our lives now should be marked by the holiness without which “*no one will see the Lord.*” (Heb 12:14) So, we too, participate in an adventure, actively on our way to that City.

God is a God of church history and of world history. To achieve his purposes, he uses enemy pagan nations, like the Roman Empire, and He uses his holy nation as the primary vehicle. When he called Abraham, he promised to form his descendants into a holy nation, who would live differently from the other nations, to bring salvation and blessing to all of humanity. “*I will make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.”* (Isa 49:6). When Jesus came, Jews and then Gentiles became the new humanity (Eph 2:15) empowered by the Holy Spirit. So we are a “*chosen people … a holy nation.” (1 Pet 2:9) We are the light of the world.* Jesus said, “*Therefor do not be like the pagans*.” (Matt 5:14; 6:7) So we are called today, *“As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written, “Be holy, because I am holy.”* (1 Pet 1:14,15) God is still using us as part of this chosen, small, but holy multi-national nation to bless his entire creation. Through us he is preparing the way to the Holy City.”

God bless you till next week when we will look more closely at what holiness is and our response to it.

**Journey of Holiness**

**Chapter 2**

Last week we started a mini-series on Holiness, for the month of February. We looked at how God intervened in holiness and power when the people of Israel faced the Red Sea, with the enemy pursuing them. Also Isaiah had an encounter with God in the temple and he saw the holiness of God. Then when Jesus came, he opened the way for us all to become part of God’s holy nation. We said that in our journey to the Holy City, we cannot separate our personal life of holiness from the plans and purposes of God in the world.

We are working from Alan Kreider’s book, *Journey towards Holiness.* Today we want to look closer at the different meanings and understanding of the word, “*holiness*”, and our response to the holiness of God. When we try to define holiness, we are not explaining an idea, but we are trying in words to approximate the character of the Inexpressible God.

If we look at peoples’ encounters with holiness since the beginning of time, they have experienced 1) a living force, a power, an awesome reality which transcends language. This is the nature and character of the Holy One, the Yahweh of the Bible. And this experience of God as Living force, is literally life-giving. When we experience this pure and loving God, we see ourselves, like Isaiah, both unholy and infinitely loved. Therefore holiness is the measuring-stick of the Holy God, and his character is revealed in the Scriptures, and expressed perfectly in Jesus, who is also called the Holy One. (Acts 3:14). It is experienced through the work of the Holy Spirit. We see in the Scriptures that holiness is never an end in itself, but is always on the move. It is the spiritual energy of God that transforms people into the image of the Holy God, and it is advancing his rule on earth.

Secondly, holiness is 2) separateness. The root of the Hebrew word for “*holy*” (*qadosh*) means *“set apart*”. Anything associated with the Holy One is unlike other things, which are common and unclean. Some things were **declared** holy by God, like the Sabbath and the Jubilee; and others were **made** holy by proper ceremony and so “sanctified” or “dedicated” to Him as holy.

So also, God’s people in the Old Testament were made holy by obeying His voice, by keeping his covenant and by observing the rituals of purification and atonement. But after the coming of the Messiah, things changed and God’s people were made holy by Jesus’ sacrifice. (Heb 10:10) But in both Testaments, it is something that God brings about. Deut 7:6 says, “For *you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth, to be his people, his treasured possession.”*

Holiness is 3) God-likeness. It has a distinctive, God-reflecting quality. True holiness is more than eccentricity. When He says, “*I am the Lord, your God, consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy,”* (Lev 11:44) it is a call to become like God, to enter into his character. When we experience God, He enables us to become like him, to be transformed; and it happens in worship. 2 Cor 3:18 shows this clearly, “*And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect (contemplate) the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness, with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”* As we travel on this road to the Holy City, the Holy One will be changing us so that we reflect his character more and more. This is rich and beautiful.

God-likeness is also whole-ness – so God has a passion to make us whole in every area of our lives. Mary Douglas put it like this, *“To be holy is to be whole, to be one; holiness is unity, integrity, perfection of the individual.”* So holiness is the way things ought to be and when the Holy One comes – the way things will be.

Lastly, holiness is not static, but dynamic, on the move. Just as God calls his people to enter into his character, he also calls us to take part in his holy actions. So holiness is not something legalistically separate or self-preoccupied in its concerns for its own wholeness, but is always in motion. That is why Isaiah said, “*Here I am. Send me”*. And when Peter had the roof top vision of common and unclean foods, God was not trying to change his diet, He was preparing him to be midwife at the birth of a trans-national, holy nation, as we read in Acts 10. So, God is energising believers, as his chosen people and holy nation, to be participants in his own all-embracing historical plan in this world.

Then briefly, what is our response to his holiness? 1) It is praise and worship. In God’s presence we see ourselves as we are, as flawed and finite, yet infinitely loved. And our spirits will leap in response to him. Our worship will respond to what he is doing. And we will tell the story of his actions. Psa 145: 10-12, 21 says, *“All you have made will praise you, O Lord: your saints (holy ones) will extol you! They will tell of the glory of your kingdom, and speak of your might, so that all men may know your mighty acts, and the glorious splendour of your kingdom … My mouth will speak in praise of the Lord. Let every creature praise his holy name for ever and ever.”*

Another response to his holiness is 2) transformation. “*You shall be holy, for I, the Lord your God am holy*”, is not a prediction of our ultimate perfection in the after-life, but it is a call to allow ourselves to be changed into the likeness of the Holy One who will do it. God himself has taken the lead in changing us. By Jesus’ pouring out his life-blood, and by the Father sending us the Holy Spirit, God has already sanctified us and made us holy. But we are called to live in this new way, to be like Him, and to do what the Spirit desires.

So God calls us to holy living, to live distinctively, unlike the other nations, and to be like Jesus. He calls us to apply this holiness to every area of lives: our diet, savings, work and recreation. God calls us to “*social holiness”*, as John Wesley called it.

And our third response is to 3) mission – to be partners in his project. Jesus has called us and given us all authority to make disciples of all nations – this is a big vision. So we are called to invite others to carry this new passport, to become part of this **holy** nation, coming to be like Him and joining him in his work.

God bless you till next week as we continue to learn how to walk this journey of holiness.

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**Chapter 3**

Last week we said the meaning of holiness is God’s living spiritual energy that transforms people into his image. It also means to be “set apart”. God has set us apart and made us holy, and goes on transforming us. This happens in worship. Holiness is also dynamic, on the move, part of God’s plan in this world. In response to His holiness we praise and worship the Holy God, yielding ourselves to his transforming power, and saying, “*Here am I. Send me”.* As his holy people we work with him to make disciples of all nations.

Today we look more specifically at Jesus as the Holy One. In Luke 1:35 the angel said that, “*The holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.”*  Although Jesus did not say much about holiness, yet in his teachings he was always talking about social holiness. Everyone who met Jesus saw in him the qualities of holiness – God’s living force, which radiated his loving energy; also separateness – he was different from anyone they ever met; also God-likeness – Jesus gave the Holy God a face to the world; and dynamism – power flowed from him and was changing the world.

People’s response to Jesus was either worship or rejection. His followers imitated him and allowed him to shape their common lives; they were extending work of the Holy One. Jesus was their model of holiness. At his baptism the Holy Spirit descended upon him, like a dove. He knew the presence of his Father. He announced the arrival of God’s Kingdom and told his hearers to repent, and to believe and respond to God’s salvation.

When Jesus’ holiness encountered impurity, impurity was put on the defensive, like when the woman with the issue of blood touched Him. She did not make him unclean or unholy, (as the Law said would happen) but instead his holiness flowed into her. Holiness is wholeness and life, and it was a force for change. The Pharisees were offended because Jesus sat and ate with the unclean and unholy sinners, but Jesus showed them that swallowing something unclean did not defile a person; it was a matter of one’s heart. Jesus still wants to free people from uncleanness, and fill them with love, if they admit their need of him. Then He will embrace them with healing forgiveness.

Jesus showed the Pharisees that legalism and ceremonial holiness did not carry any weight, but the weightier issues were justice, mercy and faith.

Jesus continually addressed the issues of provision and protection, because people always worried about these two issues. Encountering Jesus affects one’s perspective in these 2 areas. He proclaimed God’s favour and willingness to meet these needs of provision and protection, in every man and woman. His heart went out to the poor, and he shared the good news with them. Yet He was concerned for the rich, and showed that wealth had a grab at the heart and could become an alternative god that chokes out the good news. It created a source of security that was faith-less. Holiness in God’s Kingdom is also marked by spontaneous sharing and generosity. So Jesus urges us to lend without expecting in return, to help the poor, and to forgive the debts of others. And to our surprise we will find that we are not only giving, but receiving abundantly in return.

Jesus called his disciples to live a lifestyle that was set apart from the ways of the nations. Holiness was not a ritual purity, but a radical trusting way of life. “*Do not be anxious. Don’t worry about possessions, clothing or food!”* As we give priority to God’s Kingdom and his righteousness, God who knows our needs, will provide. (Matt 6:25)

He also shaped his disciples into his own image. As they experienced forgiveness of their debts, they would forgive the debts of others. They would begin to treat others as God had treated them. As they did so, they would begin to express God-likeness to the world. And today, being holy as God is holy, means being merciful, even as the Father is merciful. (Luke 6:36)

As the disciples experienced Jesus’ dynamic holiness, they experienced God at work, changing things. Zacchaeus encountered the holiness of Jesus, and redistributed his goods, repaying everything fourfold he had taken by fraud. His values changed. So holiness produces a new form of security.

When Peter reminded Jesus that they had left everything behind, He said that those who gave away houses and lands and families, would receive back a hundredfold in this age, and life in the future age. Mark 10:30.

Jesus was building a holy nation, and teaching that love was the new law of this nation - love for neighbours and love for enemies, because holiness would affect their understanding of protection. Their security no longer lay in how they defended themselves, but in loving their enemies. The world’s view of self-preservation only perpetuates oppression. The compassionate Father is still the enemy-lover, and we are to reflect his likeness of compassionate caring. Jesus invites us as his followers to be like the Father, and to share his family likeness. He said, *“You will be God’s children if you are peacemakers and enemy-lovers.”* So we are to resemble the Father in being perfect as He is perfect; meaning whole, complete, undiscriminating. We are to “*pray for our enemies*,” to be “*men of peace*” (Luk 10:6). He said, *“I tell you my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that can do no more*.” (Luk 12:4)

Jesus showed that God’s way of holiness, means adopting a separate, different approach - imitating the Holy One. By listening to Him and watching Him we learn to be like him, to be holy as he is holy. Then we go out in risk and follow our Teacher even into conflict; as when Jesus cleansed the unholy temple, full of injustice. God wanted more than ritual holiness, he wanted social holiness.

Then Jesus was crucified at the Place of the Skull, the most unholy place, becoming unholiness. He poured out his blood for our sins, was raised from the dead and brought us resurrection power. Through Jesus’ blood and his grace, we become part of this new holy nation. Before Jesus ascended, He gave the disciples the biggest assignment of all – to reach the world with his power and holiness. He sent them send the Holy Spirit. So we, too, can receive a new immersion in holiness, to be empowered by the Holy Spirit, to reach the whole world in his name. God bless you till next week when we conclude this study of holiness.