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Sermon

Yahweh HaKaddesh – The Lord who Makes us Holy

Psalm 23v5; Hebrews 12

10th October 2021

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Ian spoke last week from Psalm 23, on the name “Yahweh Tsidekenu” - “The Lord, our righteousness.” I am sure you will have understood from his talk why righteousness is so important. It speaks of relating rightly. We are righteous, when we relate rightly to God and to people.

Today, we look at the name of God implied in Psalm 23v5. “*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over.*”

David is describing a scene involving himself, and God, who is High and Holy and unimaginably far separated from David’s sinfulness. The Supreme Governor of the Universe confronts David’s enemies, who are accusing him and baying for his blood. They have no choice but to slink back and watch in horror and hatred and envy, as the Lord stoops to put on an apron, prepares a meal, lays the table, and fills David’s glass with wine.

The Lord’s bright presence forms a barrier through which the evil ones have no access to David. Not only does God act as a servant, but he marks David with special regard and honour by anointing David’s head with oil, and gives him so much precious, delicious and expensive wine that it nearly overflows onto the table.

This is how much he honours and values David. He not only invites David to the finest banquet, but he also humbles himself to serve and honour David above other guests - as well as doing it in front of those who seek to accuse and shame him.

David was not morally perfect, but was given honour by Yahweh Hakaddesh: (that’s God’s name meaning “I am the Lord who makes you holy.”)

Ceremonial anointing in the Old Testament was a physical act of putting sacred oil, on someone or something. It showed that God’s presence was with them, His favour was upon them and that they were set apart for a special purpose. An honoured guest at a dinner table might also be anointed with a fragrant oil, as a mark of high respect and honour. It would be obvious to all the other guests that he or she deserved special respect.

Anointing is also like when a NZ sheep farmer marks one of his sheep. A bit more utilitarian, it is a mark of separation from the others, separation for a particular purpose.

Our understanding of holiness comes from the Hebrew word *Kadosh* which means “to cut.” To be holy means to be cut off, or separate, from everything else. It means to be in a class of one’s own, distinct from anything that has ever existed or ever will exist. *Kadosh* also

means a second thing: to be holy, that is, entirely morally pure, all the time and in every way possible.

When you put these two elements of holiness together, it means that God occupies a moral space that no one has ever occupied before, and as such, we have no experience or frame of reference to understand what he is like because there's nothing else like him.

When Paul in Acts 17 spoke to the people in Athens, he was speaking to people who had a long tradition of worshipping gods. Gods, they understood, were like humans but with special supernatural powers. Their gods had human weaknesses, had arguments among themselves and generally behaved badly - but held power over people, and not necessarily in a good way. They also needed to be appeased, so that they would not be randomly spiteful to the humans who worshipped them. The Athenians needed someone to tell them that there is one God who is *Kadosh*.

Many of the people Ian and I met in Africa needed to hear that too. As animists or Muslims, they needed to see the proof of Yahweh's uniqueness demonstrated, by having sicknesses healed in front of their eyes.

As I thought about all this, I wondered, "Why does holiness matter so much?" Most of my life, I have vaguely thought about holiness as something that describes God and frankly had little to do with me. I knew that I wasn't holy, but was somehow protected by him.

In Hebrews 12:14 we read, "Make every effort to live in peace with all men (that's to do with righteousness) AND to be holy, for without holiness, no-one will see the Lord." Seeing the Lord means that you survive all the trials and hardships life throws at you, still trusting in Jesus and you get to live with God forever. So it is a question of the utmost *personal* importance at least, without even considering those whom you influence.

In the final few verses of the book of Revelation, we get an indication of how important it is. (Rev 22:10-15) *"Then he told me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this scroll, because the time is near. Let the one who does wrong continue to do wrong; let the vile person continue to be vile; let the one who does right continue to do right; and let the holy person continue to be holy."*

"Take notice, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.

"Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

All through the Bible, God says, "Be holy, for I am holy." God cannot dwell where unholiness is.

So how do we obtain holiness? Ultimately, it is a free gift. A costly one for Jesus to give, but free to us. We are set apart, made holy, by the blood of Jesus. We wash our robes in the blood of Jesus. I used to have a friend who was a mechanic and he told me that he observed that blood from a cut on his hand would cleanse his hands from the grease and grime of his work better than anything else.

We trust that Jesus has paid the price for us to be absolutely free from sin and fit for the Master's use. That is true, the moment we respond to Jesus' invitation. We trust that his blood is enough to pay for all our wrongdoing. We receive Yahweh-InKaddesh—The Lord, my Holiness, my Sanctification.

As we respond to his kindness, we will make every effort to live in a manner which pleases him. We do that out of love. Out of love, we choose to live out of the “new me”, not the “old me”.

Paul encourages us in 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 “Now may the God of peace sanctify you completely and may your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful and he will bring it to pass.”

This implies that this sanctification or setting apart is a process and it needs to happen not only in our spirit, but involves our soul and our body. Knowing what the goal is, we need to co-operate with God in the process. Woe betide the All Black who doesn't know where the goal is! If we ignore the gentle nudge of the Holy Spirit and head off towards old thought patterns and old habits, we are resisting God and it will be harder for us to score. Hebrews 12 reminds us that we are surrounded with a great cloud of witnesses. Heaven is watching. We are being cheered on. And we need correction at times. V10 says “God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness”. He is our coach, our shepherd. Our job is to make every effort to match our steps with his, not wander off like senseless sheep.

We are encouraged to run with perseverance the race marked out for us. We are not the ones who call the shots – the race is marked out for us before we even set forth. We are given parameters in our life, just like the people who were given certain differing amounts of money in Jesus' parable of the talents.

I was thinking over my life in a lockdown way recently, but looking at old photos. I have some lovely memories, but I can only live one life. I need to do the best with what I have. It makes me think of Hebrews 12:14, where it says, “Make every effort to live in peace with all men, and to be holy, for without holiness, no-one will see the Lord.”

When the Lord was giving instructions in OT times about the way he wanted to be worshipped, there were instructions about holy things; the temple being holy, the altar being holy etc. We can make the mistake of viewing holiness as exactly equal to being sinless. But a holy garment or a holy table cannot sin, can it? Of course not. What made them holy was that they were being used for God, according to the way he wanted them used. They were set apart from the common items of everyday use, earmarked to be used only for the worship of God.

Yahweh Hakaddesh means: “I am the Lord who makes you holy.” But the words that follow are “Be holy, for I am holy.” This means that we have a choice in the matter. We can put effort in to the whole deal. We can cooperate or resist. Another verse in 2 Cor 6 says, “Separate yourselves from among them.... Touch no unclean thing and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you and you will be my sons and daughters.”

Paul then goes on to say, “Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.”

So this is our part of the deal. For example, it's no good sitting amongst a pile of pornography or Mills and Boon books, saying, “I can't help it! It's not my fault! Hey, I'm not as bad as so-and-so!” Our sins may well be results of our past, to some extent. We all have had difficulties that predispose us toward certain things, but where we are now is our responsibility.

The choices we make today are ours to make. We do not need to be limited by our pasts, if we choose to follow Jesus. He is the one who is holy first, he becomes our holiness, then with our cooperation, he expresses his life through us, making it visible to those around.

What is Jesus attitude to holiness? Well, He certainly didn't tolerate those who would gather up their skirts and refuse to be contaminated by sinners! He's not the chief of the “Holier than thou” brigade. His prayer for you and me in John 17 was “Father, My prayer is not that you would take them out of the world, but that you would protect them from the evil one. Sanctify them by the truth: Your word is truth.”

Jesus isn't going to make us holy by use of a magic wand. Process is his method. But he knows we are vulnerable and that the formula is not "one plus one = holiness". It's not just "Die for them, and then they are holy when they choose to become believers." There is an enemy to take into account, a wild card. So my closing remarks will put a sword in your hand instead of a magic wand.

I have two invitations for you. First, we have a choice: we can focus on the enemies around us and the doubt, fear and lacks inside us – or we can focus on the table prepared for us by God. The table set before us has fragrant, fresh bread on it.

Let's dig into His word and allow him to change us. Your homework for next week is to read and meditate on the second half of Acts 17 and/or on Hebrews 12. Invite God to come by his Holy Spirit as you read, to add wine to the bread of his word so you can swallow and digest it.

Secondly, our Father anoints our heads with oil, he honours us, he sets us apart. For what purpose? He wants us to be filled with a sense of purpose in life, something he has set us apart for, that only we can do. Let's ask him to reveal that purpose, help us grow in it and so display his goodness and holiness, that others are drawn into the light.

Glory be to God. Amen.