

## On Holy Ground

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Good morning.

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Please turn with me to Exodus 3:1-6

Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. And he led the flock to the back of the desert, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.

And the Angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed.

Then Moses said, "I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn."

So when the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am."

Then He said, "Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground."

Moreover He said, "I am the God of your father; the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God.

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Our lesson this morning ... is titled ... "We Are Standing On Holy Ground"

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What is ... Holy Ground?

It's a place ... a location ... that is deemed sacred or hallowed.

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In Jerusalem ... at the Temple ... there were places where only the Jews (God's people by physical birth) ... were allowed to go.

The Apostle Paul was falsely accused of bringing a Gentile into the inner courts of the Temple.

Trophimus was an Ephesian ... who had accompanied Paul ... returning to Jerusalem ... from the third missionary journey.

There remain ... even today ... some of the warnings that were set up to designate areas where no Gentiles were permitted.

They were stone pillars that bore warnings to non-Jewish persons (Gentiles) ... to go no further.

The inscriptions read ... translated into English, of course ... “No stranger is to enter within the balustrade round the temple and enclosure. Whoever is caught will be himself responsible for his ensuing death.”

No one ... but God’s people ... could stand on Holy Ground.

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You’re probably getting an idea of where we’re headed this morning. Right?

Now that Christ has established the Church ... all peoples are God’s people. Not by physical birth ... but by spiritual birth. Just as Jesus told Nicodemus ... “born of the water and the Spirit.” Born anew ... out of the waters of baptism.

And just as Jesus told the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well ... the Temple would no longer be the center of worship. As we see in the Gospel scriptures ... Christians worship together in congregations around the globe.

We worship NOT in Jerusalem ... but in Spirit and in Truth.

Holy ground today ... is in the presence of the God of Heaven ... in Christ Jesus.

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I wonder sometimes ... whether we have the proper reverence for God ... and for the things He deems Holy.

Do we ... in our desire to know God and to be His friend ... do we get a bit ... lax or “sloppy” in our relationship?

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One day ... things ... just ... dawn on you, don’t they? Don’t they just ... reach out and grab you in a way they never did before?

The thought ... the idea ... that we are standing on Holy Ground ... has had that effect on me over the past few weeks.

Sure ... Moses. But me ... on holy ground?

I’ve not seen a burning bush. Or have I ... through scripture?

God hasn’t spoken to me. Or has He .... though His Word?

Hmmmmmm!!!!

This all ... has been on my mind quite a bit. It’s shifted my thinking.

And so I want ... this morning ... to get the idea churning in your heads too.

Not just IN there ... but churning.

The way we think about things ... has profound effect ... on the way we act ... on the way we behave.

When we meditate on God's thoughts and ways and desires ... allowing them to move about in our heads ... in our minds ...

... we will do His will and be "Christ-like" ... more often than not.

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We are standing on Holy Ground!

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Stephen ... when he preached to the angry Jews in Acts 7 ... recounted the incident with Moses.

Acts 7:30-33

(Moses had fled Egypt ... to the land of Midian ... to shepherd flocks for his father-in-law ... when he was 40 years old) ...

"And when forty [more] years had passed ... an Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire in a bush, in the wilderness of Mount Sinai. (Mt Horeb, God's mountain)

"When Moses saw it, he marveled at the sight; and as he drew near to observe, the voice of the Lord came to him,

"saying, 'I am the God of your fathers; the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' And Moses trembled and dared not look."

(Notice that God did not say, "I was," rather "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacon." They live on after death.

Jesus silenced the Sadducees who did not believe in the resurrection of the dead ... by saying ... in Matt 22:31-32 ... "But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.")

Acts 7:33 now ... "Then the LORD said to Moses, "Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is Holy Ground."

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It's an awesome thing to consider ... drawing near to the presence of God Himself.

It's not to be taken lightly. It's not something to be done absent-mindedly ... with little awareness. We must do so ... in fully conscious of God's grace ... and ... our place.

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About five times in the Old Testament ... God cautioned the Levite priests who served Him ... commanding ... "Be Holy, for I am Holy"

If we desire to draw near to God, we must be holy.

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Do you think of yourself ... as holy?

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As I was writing this lesson ... it dawned on me ... how often people casually use the word "holy" ... in everyday speech. It has unsettled me. It seems wrong.

Being Holy is an awesome attribute. Full of "awe." It's the nature of God.

It means sacred. Morally pure and blameless. Clean.

It also means consecrated, when referring to someone or something that God has separated out for His personal use.

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Christians ... in this audience ... have been separated out by God for His own special, holy purposes.

We have been sanctified.

In 1 Cor 6:11 ... Paul writes ... "And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."

We used to be in sin. But we were washed clean on the inside by baptism. We were made holy and were dedicated to God. We were made right with Him.

Do you think of yourself as holy? God commands us to be holy.

Do you think of yourself as being your "own person?" God says that we belong to Him.

Can God, in His holiness, make use of an impure vessel ... an impure servant?

Will God permit unholiness to draw near to His presence?

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We must work ... everyday ... to cast out the impurities that creep into our lives. We're like a boat that leaks. We have to keep bailing out the sin that leaks back in.

As our hymn goes "Purer in heart, O God, help me to be. That I Thy Holy Face, someday may see. Keep me from secret sin, reign thou my soul within. Purer in heart ... help me to be."

I believe this is what it takes to stand on Holy Ground.

Moses took off his dirty Sandals. We take off our sins.

Be holy, for I am holy.

Christians are a consecrated people. God has set us apart ... a special people for His service ... for the Lord's work.

Faithful servants must be holy in God's eyes.

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In the five or so passages in the Old Testament that I referred to earlier... God gave explicit instructions to the Levites (the priests) ... on how to consecrate themselves and all the elements of Tabernacle worship. Each time saying "be holy for I am Holy." All things were cleansed and purified by sacrifices.

As we're studying on Wednesday evenings, Tabernacle worship is a pattern (a type) of New Testament worship in the Lord's church.

Tabernacle worship represents Church worship (here today).

The Levite priests represent Christians (us).

The blood of animal sacrifice represents the Blood of Christ.

The instructions God gave the Levites to purify and consecrate themselves represent the commandments God gives Christians to make themselves holy ... to make "ourselves" holy.

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Knowing this background ... what Peter has to say in 1 Peter 1:13-19 ... really hits hard ... really hits home.

Peter urgently cautions us to live righteous lives (holy lives) ... so that we may receive the "end of our faith" – "the salvation of our souls."

And so he says ... vs 13 ...

"Therefore gird up your minds, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance;

but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct,

because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."

And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear;

knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers,

but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

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Be Holy in all your conduct.

An awesomely beautiful and powerful passage of scripture.

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Let's take note of some more amazing parallels.

Queen Esther risked her life for the people of God ... when she gathered up her courage and approached her King without being summoned. Her plea for deliverance was heard.

Today ... everyday ... we ... you and I ... can pray to God ... calling upon Him as our Heavenly Father. And He will hear us and lovingly grant us a hearing. His Son Jesus Christ interceding for us.

The Hebrew writer says ... in Heb 4:14-16 ...

"Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.

For we **do not** have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin.

Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

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Let us approach the Heavenly Father's throne of love and mercy and forgiveness ... with confidence ... boldly, yet reverently. In His presence.

How marvelous is that?

We can stand on Holy ground.

But not while wearing "dirty sandals."

"Be Holy, for I am Holy."

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In the Tabernacle in the wilderness, the Ark of the Covenant was covered by a "top" called the "mercy seat." (Perhaps better understood as the "seat of mercy," or where mercy was to be received.)

And it covered the Law ... contained inside.

Two Cherubin overshadowed the Mercy Seat.

The Ark was behind the second veil (The second veil was the one torn when Jesus died).

Behind the second veil was the "Holy of Holies," or "The Most Holy Place."

The "Holy of Holies" represents Heaven.

Once per year, the Levitical High Priest carried the animal blood of atonement into the Holy of Holies, and sprinkled in on the Mercy Seat.

And thus the sins of the people were covered for yet another year.

This pattern is rich beyond measure.

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In Exodus 25:22 ... God said ... "You shall put the mercy seat on top of the ark. And there I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim."

Christ became our eternal High Priest when He carried His own blood into Heaven, and "sprinkled it" before God's throne of Mercy.

The Apostle John wrote ... 1 John 2:1-2 ... "My little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world."

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God not only meets us in prayer "in Christ," He meets us in worship "in Christ."

Christ has become our "Mercy Seat." It's all wrapped up the words "The Propitiation." Not "A," but "The." Nothing but the blood of Jesus Christ could bring God and man back together at the seat of mercy.

Don't we sing? ... "Nothing but the blood of Jesus?"

In Christ, we can approach God and stand humbly in His presence ... in prayer and worship.

We are standing on Holy Ground

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Are we being Holy as God is Holy?

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In 1 Cor 6:19 ... Paul wrote ... "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own."

"You Are Not Your Own!"

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We really need to pay more attention to God. All the time, not just every now and then. We've got to listen For Him .. listen TO Him.

He's our loving Father. He's all-wise. He knows where to find the good things in this life ... and in the life to come. Above all ... He knows where the pitfalls and landmines are located, even when we don't. Especially when we don't.

Too often we take God's will as a suggestion. Or as something we plan to get around to soon. Or worse ... as a ... "thanks ... good to know" type situation.

I think it's like we've been called to disarm a huge time bomb. And we have no idea how to do it. But God does ... and He's going to talk us through it. We're hanging on His every word. Sweat rolling down our faces. We dare not miss a cue or make a mistake. There's way too much to lose. Our souls are at stake.

Yet we are reluctant to push back on the cares and wants of our lives. We're slow to make more room for God.

The world is squeezing us ... demanding more and more of our time and attention. It's crowding God out. It's as if the world is saying ... "be worldly for I am worldly."

It's not who shouts the loudest ... God or the world ... it's which voice we're tuned to hear.

(In a Hymn called "I Would Be True" ... there is a phrase that goes 'I would be tuned to hear the slightest whisper ...')

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We are children of God

John said ... in 1 John 3:1 ... See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; and such we are.

How marvelous. How wonderful.

We can approach the Father. We can draw near to Him.

The scriptures revealed by His Holy Spirit teach us how to purify ourselves.

We can be holy as He is holy.

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We are standing on Holy Ground

Meditate on this truth. Pray about it. See if it doesn't change you.

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Thank you!

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