

## Introduction

Everything that any man could ever want is found in the presence of our holy God. Every longing is met, every aspiration fulfilled, every thirst quenched, and every hunger satisfied.

## 268 10 HH The Beauty of Holiness

Today we come to the end of our series, The Happiness of Holiness. I began this series by sharing the thought that holiness and happiness do indeed belong in the same sentence. The concepts are not mutually exclusive. It is not an oxymoron. God is holy and completely joyful. That's why he is completely joyful, he is holy. It is sin that strips us of joy and sows the seeds of sorrow in our soul. Being holy as he is holy is what brings freedom, peace, joy – the happiness of holiness.

Today, as I put the capstone on this series, I can think of no greater way to end than by talking with you about the beauty of holiness. The beauty of holiness? Do those words belong in the same phrase or sentence? Is not that an oxymoron? When one thinks of holiness, one could easily think of grim-faced women in dark, grey buttoned up dresses from neck to toe, hair pulled back tightly in a bun, a severe mouth barely suppressing a frown, and black, menacing eyes surveying the landscape watching for someone to make a misstep. Or, one thinks of Pharisees in the time of Jesus watching him closely, seeing if he would heal on the Sabbath, or do something else that would transgress the traditions of the elders.

If that is how you have perceived holiness, think that way no longer. If that is how you have tried to express holiness, express it that way no longer for one of the greatest expressions of holiness is his beauty. The beauty of God? The beauty of holiness? Yes!

Listen to Psalm 27:4.

One thing I have asked from the LORD, that I shall seek:  
That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life,  
To behold the beauty of the LORD  
And to meditate in His temple.

I've always been struck by the specificity of David's request – "***one thing*** I have asked from the Lord," he said. If God said, "I will give you one thing and one thing only," what would you ask him? David, who spent a lot of time running for his life from King Saul and from the Philistines learned to focus his desires on one thing – "Lord, I just want to be here in your house. I want to stop running. I want peace so that I can come regularly into your place of worship, behold your beauty and think on your greatness."

I like how the New Living Translation puts it: "the one thing I ask of the LORD—the thing I seek most—is to live in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, *delighting in the LORD's perfections* and meditating in his Temple." Isn't that good – delighting in the Lord's perfections?

Listen to Psalm 96:6. “Splendor and majesty are before Him, strength and beauty are in His sanctuary.”

Listen to two more verses from the old King James Version. This is Psalm 29:2 and 96:9, “Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name; worship the Lord in the **beauty** of holiness” and “O worship the Lord in the **beauty** of holiness: fear before him, all the earth.”

There it is in black and white: the beauty of holiness.

Phillip Yancey who is one of the most gifted and prolific Christian writers has told his story on many occasions. He was raised in a Christian home, a strict fundamentalist Christian home where holiness was characterized more by what a person didn't do than what he did do. He went to a strict, conservative, fundamentalist Bible school and there encountered the same sub-culture with its bizarre expressions in the lives of strange people. As he grew out of adolescence into young adulthood and began to grow in discernment as to what was really happening around him – which was not holiness – his heart became disillusioned about the faith. He nearly lost it and became very cynical. But something brought him back. Something brought him around. Something renewed his faith in the living God and his Son, Jesus Christ. It was the beauty of God.

Yancey recounts how his heart was deeply stirred by the beauty in God's creation – a flower, a beautiful sunset, the waves pounding upon a beach, majestic mountains. Something moved deeply within him. He began to listen to and appreciate classical music – the rich and complex structures within in and it spoke to his longing for fulfillment and goodness and beauty. God was behind those events in his life. God was showing him the beauties of his creation and teaching him that behind those earthly beauties was his beauty. God was not just powerful, strong, and full of wisdom. God was lovely. God was ravishing. God was beautiful. It was the beauty of holiness.

Everything that any man could ever want was found in the presence of this holy God. Every longing would be met, every aspiration fulfilled, every thirst quenched, every hunger satisfied.

The apostle John saw this beauty. This is what he saw.

I saw God sitting upon his throne. I saw his power. I saw his majesty. Then I saw strange looking angelic creatures before the throne of God and they were ceaselessly saying, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God the Almighty.” Then I saw the elders around the throne casting their crowns before God and worshipping him saying, “Worthy are you O Lord, worthy are you because you have created all things and because of your will all things exist.”

It was amazing! It was unlike anything I had ever seen. I had read about such visions in the prophets but now to witness the worship of the one true God was beyond all that I ever imagined, and my heart leaped with joy, wonder, and hunger to enter. This is what I was made for.

But then a strong angel stepped forward and said, “Who is worthy to open the book and to look into it.” I had heard of such books. I knew the prophets, and I knew the book represented the plan of God. The opening of the book represented the unfolding of God's plan on the earth. If I and others

were to be saved, if I and others were to enter the beauty of holiness, someone must open the book and carry out its mission. “Who is worthy to open the book and to look into it,” the angel said.

All of us waited and waited. But no one in heaven, or on the earth, or under the earth was able to open the book and to look in it, and I began to weep greatly. Sorrow, grief, and the greatest sense of loss imaginable hammered down upon my soul for I knew that the wonders and beauties of this heavenly worship would be forever out of my reach. I knew that I and all others were unworthy to enter the presence of the holy, beautiful, and joyful God.

This is what I was made for. This is what humanity was made for. But my sin and the sins of all humanity had forever barred the way to an eternity of loveliness and grace and I began to weep greatly.

Then, one of the elders came up to me and said, “John, stop weeping. Look, the lion from the tribe of Judah, the heir to David’s throne has won the victory. He is worthy to open the book, to look into it, and to carry out the plan of God.”

I lifted my head and through eyes still filled with the tears of sorrow I saw a lamb standing. It looked as if the lamb had been slain but now the lamb was alive. It was Jesus, and he walked to the throne of God and took the book out of the hand of God and all of heaven resounded with his praise. This is what they said:

“You are worthy to take the scroll  
and break its seals and open it.

For you were slaughtered, and your blood has ransomed people for God  
from every tribe and language and people and nation.

<sup>10</sup> And you have caused them to become  
a Kingdom of priests for our God.  
And they will reign on the earth.”

Worthy is the Lamb who was slaughtered—  
to receive power and riches  
and wisdom and strength  
and honor and glory and blessing.”

Blessing and honor and glory and power  
belong to the one sitting on the throne  
and to the Lamb forever and ever.”

And those four, strange looking creatures who had been saying “Holy, holy, holy,” now were saying, “Yes, it is true. Yes, it is true.” And the elders in heaven fell before the Lamb and worshiped and my heart was full of sweet relief, peace, and joy for I knew that I had been saved for this!

What I have just dramatized for you is from Revelation 4-5 which is one of my favorite Bible passages. I love it for its drama. I love it for its truth. It tells us of the most indescribably beautiful, holy, and joyful experiences. It tells us that the way to this experience and place is barred because

of our sin. It tells us that the Lamb, Jesus Christ, the offering for our sin, can open the book, to carry out the plan of God and to bring us into the presence of God. This passage describes for us the beauty and the happiness of holiness. This passage gives us a glimpse of the glories to which God calls us. This passage gives us a glimpse of our life to come. And this passage serves to tell us that when God says, “You shall be holy for I am holy,” he is not calling us to a life of drudgery and darkness, he is not calling us to a life of boredom. He is calling us to the fulfilling of the deepest desires of our hearts – the desires for fulfillment, for joy, and for peace.

Yes, King David said, “one thing I have desired from the Lord and that I shall seek, to behold the beauty of the Lord and to meditate in his temple.” He also said, “You will make known to me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; In Your right hand there are pleasures forever.”

This is our destiny, and this destiny of glorious joy should cause us to lay aside our sins and to pursue with renewed energy the holiness of God. It should cause us to be like Christ who came to this earth to identify with us sinful people, to fight and win against our arch-enemy, to free us from our enslavements, and to celebrate our return home to the Father’s house.

Have you returned home? If not, why not call upon the Lord. Repent of your sins, run to God, and rest in his love. And if you are already in the household of God, keep your gaze upon his holy beauty, be holy as he is holy and be happy in that holiness.