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Bridgeway Church
Hebrews #40

Our God, Whose Name Is Jealous
Hebrews 12:25-29

As best I can remember, it was the spring of 1971. Ann and I had been dating for about seven months. I'm not sure how committed she was to me but I was absolutely certain that we were going to get married. As far as I was concerned, she was my girl and nothing or no one was going to get in the way of our future together.

It was early one evening when I called her and she told me that she had just returned to her sorority house after spending the dinner hour at an apartment complex in Norman. An old, high school friend of hers had come to town and had invited her to join him and some others for a cookout. This guy, whose name I will not mention, was in the Army. He evidently found out that Ann was at OU and thought he would do whatever he could to reignite an old flame.

I distinctly remember the rage in my heart when I heard this. Without even thinking about the possibility that this guy could have been highly trained in hand-to-hand combat, I raced over to that apartment complex and called him out. He and I stood toe-to-toe in the courtyard of that complex where I made it crystal clear to him that if he ever pursued Ann again I would do him serious bodily harm. He backed down and I left feeling entirely vindicated and full of myself!

There was *a strange mix of emotions and passions* at work in me that day. Some were good and some were evil. Some were constructive, others destructive. On the one hand, I hope you would think less of me if I hadn't stepped in to protect my relationship with Ann. What kind of man would stand idle and passive and allow another man to steal away the affections of the woman he loved? If I had responded with indifference toward that man who was trying to win Ann's heart and destroy our relationship, I would hardly be deserving of anything but disdain and contempt. A man who will not fight to preserve the integrity of his relationship with the woman he loves is not much of a man. Of course, by the word "fight" I mean contend, not engage in literal combat!

However, on the other hand, there were some things present in my heart that day that were profoundly and unmistakably sinful. To some extent my reaction to this man's pursuit of Ann was borne of *wounded pride*. I have to admit that I was offended that she would even have spent ten minutes with him. I was convinced that I deserved better. After all, how would it reflect on me and my reputation if word got out that Ann had dumped me for another guy? If she really respected me and valued our relationship, why didn't she simply say no when he invited her to the cookout?

There was also some *over-protective possessiveness* in my heart that was not honoring to Ann. I was angry at this guy because I perceived him to be stealing something that was rightfully mine.

But the fact is, Ann didn't belong to me. We weren't married yet. And she was ultimately responsible for whatever choices she made concerning our future together.

What this one incident reveals is what I suspect all of you already know: ***Jealousy can be both good and bad.*** Jealousy can be driven or motivated both by holy and righteous motives as well as unholy and unrighteous ones. Jealousy can be a sign of both sinful weakness and strength, of both wounded pride, on the one hand, and genuine love, on the other. Jealousy is sometimes the expression of an excessively possessive spirit, and at other times the fruit of care and concern for the welfare of the one who is loved. Jealousy is often the result of deep insecurity in a person's soul, but also a reflection of commitment and devotion to the person that you love.

We all know this, and we've all undoubtedly felt the surge and sensation of jealousy in our hearts at some time or another during the course of our relationship with certain individuals. My guess is that we often times can't even discern whether or not our jealous rage is righteous or wicked. The so-called "green-eyed-monster" is on occasion a cute, cuddly pet, while at other times it can be a vicious and carnivorous creature that devours and destroys.

That is why Christians are often stumped and confused when they read all through the Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments, that ***God is a jealous God!*** If you think I'm just making that up, think again. I'll make an undeniable and persuasive case for God's jealousy in just a moment.

In fact, that is what I want us to focus on today. There are four major themes or points of emphasis in our passage today, and it is the fourth and final one, God's jealousy, that will occupy most of our time. But let me say a few things about the first three.

(1) Do not refuse him who is speaking (v. 25)

As much as we might wish it were otherwise, there are undoubtedly people at Bridgeway and in churches everywhere who have had extensive, long-term exposure to the gospel. They have been the recipients of countless spiritual blessings and know the Bible well. But whether or not they are genuinely born again and know Christ as Lord and Savior has yet to be discerned. And many of them are at the point where they are ***flirting with apostasy***. For whatever reason, they are on the verge of turning away from Christ altogether.

This was also a problem in this first-century church to which the epistle of Hebrews was written. Their relationship to Christ has been called into question. They were on the verge of reverting back to the old covenant. They were spiritually drifting. They were neglecting the great salvation available in Christ. That is why our author continues to warn them of the consequences should they turn away from Christ.

The one who warned them on earth is a reference not so much to Moses but to God speaking at Sinai through Moses. Clearly, then, the one who warns from heaven today is also God. The point of the warning is similar to what we've seen several times already in Hebrews. If judgment came

against those who rejected God during the old covenant, how much more will those be judged who reject his appeal to repent and believe during the time of the new covenant. In other words, ***the greater the revelation the greater the responsibility***. If those who rejected Moses and Sinai were sorely punished, how much more shall they suffer who reject Christ and Zion! By just so much as Christ and Zion and the new covenant are superior to Moses and Sinai and the old covenant, so shall the judgment be of those who turn away.

(2) *The shaking of all things* (vv. 26-27)

Verses 26-27 indicate that our author clearly still has in mind what happened on Mount Sinai when the old covenant was established (Heb. 12:18-21). There was an earthquake when God spoke. According to Exodus 19:18, “the whole mountain trembled greatly.” This was such a momentous event that the people of Israel spoke of it often, as we see in Judges 5:4-5; Pss. 68:7-8; 77:18; 114:4-7.

But it would appear that ***the earthquake that occurred at Sinai was prophetic of what will occur at Christ’s Second Coming***. In other words, God has promised that there is yet to come a shaking not only of the earth but of the heavens as well, in other words, a ***cosmic shaking*** that immeasurably exceeds anything that has come before. We often hear seismologists speak of the “big one” that they believe will strike California. Well, this is ***the really, really, really big one***, one so great that everything that is not properly related to God and devoted to his glory will crumble in the dust.

Humanity is quite proud of its accomplishments, be they economic, political, governmental, educational, military, philosophical, or financial. Know this for certain: Everything will be shaken. Only the Creator himself and those who are united to him by faith in Christ shall remain firm and unmoved. He’s talking about ***a purging of this world of all its sinful and peripheral elements so that only what God has approved will last***.

That which is to be shaken and removed is here described as ***“things that have been made”*** (v. 27). But he doesn’t mean that the creation is evil. Let’s not forget that we are also a part of that creation. The distinction he has in mind is based on one’s relationship to God. In other words, the “things that have been made” is not necessarily a reference to merely physical objects. And ***“the things that cannot be shaken”*** is not necessarily a reference to what is spiritual or immaterial. He means that ***whatever is devoted to God and reflects his glory and is consecrated to his service will remain while everything that is defiling and corruptible, whether physical or spiritual, and stands in opposition to God and is outside the domain of his kingdom reign will be removed***.

I have an app on my I-Phone called *Quake Feed*. It’s free and you ought to try it out. I downloaded the app last year as the frequency of earthquakes here in Oklahoma began to capture my attention. Within one minute it will list the most recent earthquake anywhere around the globe. You can read of the place, the intensity, and the time of every quake. It’s odd, I must

confess, to see Guthrie, OK, or Medford, OK, or even Edmond, OK, listed repeatedly alongside Indonesia, Alaska, Chile, and other hotspots around the world.

But there is something incredibly instructive and challenging about these earthquakes, especially ones that occur in our own state. ***They are a constant reminder from God that everything in which we put our trust is fragile and subject to destruction. Everything that I count on for happiness and prosperity can be shaken and crumble in a pile of dust in a matter of seconds. Everything other than God and his kingdom is precarious, volatile, and insecure.***

It doesn't matter what the immediate cause of such earthquakes may be, whether from fracking or waste-water disposal or whatever other theory seismologists come up with. The ultimate cause of all such quakes is the sovereign Lord over heaven and earth. And we need to listen closely to the message he's sending us.

Until now, such earthquakes appear to be ***indiscriminate and random***. You can't predict them and when they hit everyone is affected, both the righteous and unrighteous. But there is one final quake that will ***differentiate*** between what is of eternal value and what is of only temporal use. And this "final, eschatological earthquake is designed precisely to differentiate between what loves God and serves God and exists for his glory as over against all in creation that opposes him. Simply put, everything that is righteous will remain and everything that is unrighteous will be destroyed" (John Piper).

(3) Acceptable worship (v. 28)

And what should be our response? Gratitude and heart-felt, reverent worship! Don't overlook the word ***"therefore"*** with which v. 28 begins. It is precisely ***because*** God will shake and purge and judge all that stands in opposition to him and precisely ***because*** only the unshakeable kingdom of Christ will stand immovable and unchanged that we should give thanks and praise God for the gift of saving grace.

Why does he here qualify our worship with the words "reverence and awe"? I think it must be due to the fact that God's sovereignty over all nature will be on display in this final shaking of the cosmos. God's power and majesty and holy justice will be seen in a way that they have never before been manifest. This revelation of God's omnipotent splendor ought to cause us to reverently tremble. That doesn't mean our worship isn't also to be joyful and exuberant, as we saw in Hebrews 12:22-24. There are times when what we hear and learn of God leads to ***dancing***, and other times when what we hear and learn of him leads to ***trembling***. Worship that is acceptable to God can and should be both humble and happy, and should often lead us not only to leap with joy but also to lie prostrate on the ground in reverential awe.

(4) Our God, whose Name is Jealous (v. 29)

I run the immediate risk of offending people when I say that God is jealous. After all, doesn't the apostle Paul include jealousy along with other sins like sorcery and anger and drunkenness and orgies as "the works of the flesh" (Gal. 5:19-20)? Yes, he does. ***So where do I get off daring to say that the gloriously holy God of heaven and earth is himself jealous?***

That's a good question. So let me make it even more befuddling by asking a couple more questions. Why does God urge everyone not to refuse him when he calls? What is the underlying motive for the call to this depth of devotion and this intensity of love and praise? Why should we be diligent to worship God with gratitude and joy? Why should we be holy as God is holy? The answer is that he is a jealous God!

Before you dismiss this as a moral outrage ("How *dare* anyone accuse God of something as petty as *jealousy*!"), carefully consider the following array of biblical texts. After reading them, we'll come back to any lingering concern you might feel.

"You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments" (Exod. 20:4-6).

Remarkably, it isn't to his righteousness or holiness or justice or majesty or sovereignty or any other attribute that God appeals, but to his jealousy.

"For you shall worship no other god, for the Lord, ***whose name is Jealous***, is a jealous God" (Exod. 34:14).

Here we see that the primary reason, the pre-eminent ground on which one might build the case for worshipping nothing else or no one else, is the fact that ***God's name is Jealous!*** In the ancient world one's ***name*** was not merely a label or a tag, but a declaration of one's character. Thus, in the very depths of God's divine character burns the fire of jealousy. Jealousy is central to the fundamental essence of who God is. Jealousy is at the core of God's identity as God. Jealousy is that defining characteristic or personality trait that makes God God. Whatever other reasons you may find in Scripture for worshipping and serving and loving God alone, and there are many of them and they are all good, paramount among them all is the fact that ***our God burns with jealousy for the undivided allegiance and affection of his people.***

Here are a few other texts:

"Phinehas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, has turned back my wrath from the people of Israel, in that he was jealous with my jealousy among them, so that I did not consume the people of Israel in my jealousy" (Num. 25:11).

The words of Hebrews 12:29, “for our God is a consuming fire,” are themselves a direct citation of Deuteronomy 4:24. But the author of Hebrews only cited the first half of the verse. The entire text reads:

"For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, *a jealous God*" (Deut. 4:24).

That is to say, the “fire” that characterizes the heart of our God is burning jealousy for the full devotion of his people!

"You shall not go after other gods, any of the gods of the peoples who are around you – for the Lord your God in your midst is a jealous God – lest the anger of the Lord your God be kindled against you, and he destroy you from off the face of the earth” (Deut. 6:14-15; cf. 29:20)

"They stirred him to jealousy with strange gods; with abominations they provoked him to anger" (Deut. 32:16; cf. 32:21).

An especially interesting text is the following passage from Ezekiel.

“He put out the form of a hand and took me by a lock of my head, and the Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven and brought me in visions of God to Jerusalem, to the entrance of the gateway of the inner court that faces north, where was the seat of the image of jealousy, which provokes to jealousy” (Ezekiel 8:3).

The Israelites had placed an idol of some sort at the entrance to the north gate of the temple. Literally, it reads "the jealousy that provokes jealousy", a reference to the passion that this object ignites in God's heart. "Look," says the Lord, "look at that abominable statue which draws away the hearts of my people. They are loving it, not me. They are bowing down to it, not me. I am red hot with jealousy, for I will not stand for anything or anyone to come between me and the devotion of my bride!"

"But Joshua said to the people, 'You are not able to serve the Lord, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God . . . ' (Joshua 24:19).

The reason they will not be able to serve God is because they thought they could do so while simultaneously holding on to the idols of the Canaanites whose land they had just entered.

"For they provoked him to anger with their high places; they moved him to jealousy with their idols"(Ps. 78:58).

"Therefore thus says the Lord God, 'Now I will restore the fortunes of Jacob and have mercy on the whole house of Israel, and I will be jealous for my holy name' (Ezek. 39:25).

"Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?" (1 Cor. 10:22).

For people to sit both at the table of demons and the table of the Lord, i.e., for people to walk in idolatry, whatever form it might take, and then to partake of the Lord's Supper, will only serve to stoke the fires of jealousy in God's already burning heart.

There are numerous other texts which say much the same thing (see also 1 Kings 14:22; Ezek. 16:38,42; 23:25; 36:5ff; 38:19; Joel 2:18; Nahum 1:2; Zeph. 1:18; 3:8; Zech. 1:14; 8:2; Ps. 79:5). But I think I've made my point.

Passionately Jealous

God is an emotional being. He experiences within the depths of his being genuine passions, contrary to those who would affirm the doctrine of divine impassibility. The Bible is replete with references to divine joy, mercy, love, compassion, kindness, hatred, just to mention a few. But what of jealousy? The fact that we balk at the suggestion that God might be truly jealous indicates that we have a weak, insipid view of the divine nature. ***At the very core of his being, in the center of his personality is an inextinguishable blaze of immeasurable love called jealousy.***

What exactly does it mean to say that God feels or experiences jealousy? Most of us have seen or felt or been on the receiving end of human jealousy that is destructive and sinful and ugly. We naturally recoil from the suggestion that God might to any degree be tainted with such a terrible flaw of character.

To say that God is jealous certainly does not mean that he is suspicious because of some insecurity in his heart. This kind of jealousy is the result of ignorance and mistrust. Such is surely not true of God. Nor does it mean he is ***wrongfully envious*** of the success of others. Jealousy that is sinful is most often the product of anxiety and bitterness and fear. But surely none of this could be true of God. Sinful jealousy is the sort that longs to possess and control what does not properly belong to oneself; it is demanding and cares little for the supposed object of its love.

But as J. I. Packer explains, "God's jealousy is not a compound of frustration, envy, and spite, as human jealousy so often is, but appears instead as a . . . ***praiseworthy zeal to preserve something supremely precious***" (*Knowing God*, 153; emphasis mine). Divine jealousy is thus a zeal to protect a love relationship or to avenge it when it is broken. ***Jealousy in God is that passionate energy by which he is provoked and stirred and moved to take action against whatever or whoever stands in the way of his enjoyment of what he loves and desires. The intensity of God's anger at threats to this relationship is directly proportionate to the depths of his love.***

This is no momentary or sporadic or infrequent or occasional burst of anger or minor irritation in the heart of God. This is no passing twinge in God's mind. This is the incessant, intensely persistent burning in the heart of the infinitely powerful, uncreated God. In the ancient near east, the word for "jealousy" literally meant to become intensely red, a reference to the effects of anger on one's facial complexion. Jealousy in God is not a "green-eyed monster" but a "**red-faced lover**" who will brook no rivals in his relationship with his people.

For what is God Jealous?

First of all, **God is most jealous for his own glory, fame, and honor!** God desires above all else that his name be preserved and promoted and he will act quickly and powerfully to vindicate his glory.

God is jealous for the supremacy of his name in this world, in this land, in your home, in your life, and in our church. It isn't your name that he is jealous to protect, but his own. Your reputation is not first on God's agenda. **His is.**

Consider the incredible events that unfolded in the life of Nebuchadnezzar as told in Daniel 4. To put it bluntly, he was reduced to live as a cow for seven years. Why, for heaven's sake? Because he provoked God to jealousy. He claimed glory and responsibility for what God alone had done. His judgment would last until he came to recognize "that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will" (4:32; cf. 4:37).

Worse still was the judgment that came upon King Herod, although the reason for it was the same as in the case of Nebuchadnezzar. We read in Acts 12:21-23: "Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him down because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and breathed his last". God's jealousy for the glory of his name is so intense that he may well send worms to gnaw and consume the flesh of anyone who dares try to keep a little for himself!

God is a Jealous Lover!

Earlier I said that God is most jealous for the glory of his name. But **God is also jealous for the devotion and wholeheartedness and loyalty and love of his bride, his people.** Just as a husband cannot be indulgent of adultery in his wife, so also God cannot and will not endure infidelity in us. What would we think of a man or woman who does not experience jealous feelings when another person approaches his/her spouse and threatens to win their affection? We would regard such a person as deficient in moral character and lacking in true love.

If I were to receive a phone call or letter with news that a man had been seen delivering flowers to my wife, expensive gifts, or serenading her outside our bedroom window, and I did nothing, felt nothing, would this not be a reflection on my lack of character, lack of love, and lack of zeal for the welfare of my wife and my relationship with her?

This is what Jesus had in mind in Matthew 10:37 when He said, "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." It is as if he said, "I don't mind you loving your father and mother and children. In fact, I insist on it! But you must not love them more than you love me. I must be pre-eminent in your affections!"

In a word, the fire of divine zeal will consume and destroy and leave in a pathetic rubble of worthless ash anything and everything that we have built or worked for or given our hearts to or relied upon that in any way or to any degree detracts from the glory of his name or threatens the purity of his relationship with his bride, the church. This is why God is shaking everything that can be shaken (Hebrews 12:26-29).

God is the only One for whom Jealous Passion for his own Glory is an act of Love

"But Sam. It seems so **selfish** of God to be jealous for his own glory. It seems so self-centered of him to destroy anything that might hinder our love for him and devotion to him." Yes, I know it seems that way, but you must remember that ***God is the only Being for whom jealous passion for his own glory is a supreme act of love.*** Perhaps I should say that again . . . Now, let me briefly explain.

If God is going to love you he must give you the best, most beautiful, and most satisfying thing in all the universe. He must freely give you the greatest treasure, the most exquisite prize, the most enduring and enjoyable thing in all the universe. And what might that be? Himself, of course! But that is only half the story. God must then work in your heart so that you experience him as the preeminent treasure that he is. He must awaken in your soul satisfaction in himself. He must open your eyes to his beauty and lead you to taste and savor the sweetness of knowing him and loving him and enjoying him.

Does that sound like God is pursuing his own glory and his own praise? Yes. But it also sounds like God is loving you passionately and powerfully. It could not be otherwise ***unless there is something other than God with which he can satisfy your soul.*** It could not be otherwise unless there is something other than God with which he might captivate your heart and fascinate your mind and with which he might bring you into unending joy and delight and peace and happiness. But there is no such thing! That is why it is true of God alone that for him to pursue his own glory and praise is for him to love and bless you. God's jealous pursuit of his own glory and fame is the most loving thing he could ever do for you. God's jealous passion for the undivided loyalty and praise of your heart is the preeminent expression of his love for sinful men and women like you and me. For you to deny that is to say that there is something or someone or an experience of some sort that can satisfy and enthrall your soul more than God can. And that is blasphemy!

Simply put: for God to say, “Come and worship me, come and glorify my name, come and be wholly devoted to my praise and fame,” is the greatest expression of his love for you, because in your worship and enjoyment of him is your highest and deepest and most lasting satisfaction.

Conclusion

Our God is a jealous God. He is jealous for the expansion and growth and spiritual health of his unshakeable kingdom. God is jealous for the undivided allegiance and devotion of your heart to him and his glory. This is how he demonstrates his love for you and me.

This doesn't mean that when adversity comes we are spared. It doesn't mean that when the earth quakes or the tornados blow or the floods overwhelm that we are not among those who suffer loss. To receive this unshakeable kingdom means that no matter what happens we can rest assured that “we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” (Rom. 8:37). It means that regardless of what is destroyed now or at the final shaking of all things we may rest assured that “neither death nor life nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38-39). It means that “whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's” (Rom. 14:8).

And so the question each of us must answer today is this: Are you worshipping the unshakeable and unchangeable God or is your trust and hope and confidence wrapped up in shakeable things: your health, computers, cars, money, houses, vacations, or your 401(k)? What is your ultimate treasure: God or this world? Where is your faith: in the unshakeable God and his kingdom or in the shakeable, transient treasures of this earth?

God is deeply jealous that he alone be the object of your affection and that he alone be the focus of your faith and that he alone be the rock on which you stand and that he alone be the foundation for your future. My prayer is that you will be equally jealous for the same thing!