

## Holy Ghost?

On Sunday, we began a new sermon series called “Ghost Stories” in which we’ll explore mystical Scriptures that tell us about the “Holy Ghost,” aka, the “Holy Spirit.”

1. Warm up question: The term “Holy Spirit” is an oxymoron. In other words, “Holy” and “Spirit” are two words that, during Old Testament times, seemed like polar opposites. To get into the spirit of thinking about opposites, what are two words or people or things or foods that, in your opinion, clearly don’t go together?
  
2. The Hebrew word for “holy” was “qodesh” [KO-desh]. Originally it referred to things that are separate or withdrawn from ordinary life. So, when our ancestors referred to God as “holy,” they meant that God is mysterious, powerful, dangerous, not approachable, and completely other. To them, God was fearsome and you were best to keep your distance. For an example of this way of thinking, read I Samuel 6:1-9.
  - a. Israel’s enemy, the Philistines, had captured Israel’s “Ark of the Covenant” in battle. The Ark was an ornate wooden box that contained holy relics, including the Ten Commandments. Except when taken into battle, the Ark was kept in the inner sanctum of the tabernacle where only certain priests could go under very restricted circumstances. Wherever the Ark was, the Israelites believed there was a special concentration of the presence of God, kind of like some modern Catholics who believe their holy relics are infused with a special concentration of God’s power. What do you believe? Do you believe holy relics can result in a special concentration of the power of God?
  - b. After capturing the Ark, the Philistines experienced an infestation of mice who brought a plague that caused many Philistines to die of tumors. They assumed it was because they had seized the Ark of the Covenant. Do you think that’s possible? Do you think God would do something like that? Why or why not?
  
3. Now read the rest of the story: I Samuel 6:10-21. At first, the Israelites living in Beth-shemesh [Beth-she-mesh] rejoiced to have the Ark in their midst. But then things took a dark turn. Verse 19 is difficult to piece together from ancient manuscripts, but if you take account of the textual notes added by the translators, the verse seems to say that some of the people of Beth-shemesh (associated with the family of Jeconiah) dared to open the Ark and looked at the holy relics inside, then died. That caused all the people of Beth-shemesh to become very afraid and no longer want the special presence of God among them anymore.
  - a. Look again at verse 20. Have you ever experienced this feeling? Have you ever been so afraid of God you just wanted to send God away? Why? What happened?

- b. The vastness and awesomeness of God can be a scary thing. Jeff compared it to the power of a fearsome tornado he witnessed as a kid. What powerful thing have you witnessed in life that helps you to imagine the vastness of God's power?
  - c. Are you afraid of God? Should we be? Why or why not?
4. "Holy" is not the only Old Testament word used for God. Another word is "ruwach" [ROO-akh], which originally referred to breath and wind, but came to also refer to the invisible power and presence of God everywhere. Whereas the word "holy" emphasizes the vastness and differentness of God, the word "spirit" emphasizes how close, gentle, and intimate God wants to be.
- a. Read Psalm 139:1-12. These verses emphasize how tenderly close God is to us every second of life, no matter where we go. Jeff shared an example of a time he felt the closeness of God after his dog Turkey died, i.e., the story of the golden moth. He also shared a story of a time Fred Mitchell experienced that tender closeness, i.e., when an evangelist touched his chest and gave him the message that he was beloved by God just as he was. When in your life have you experienced a tender moment where the invisible presence of God ministered to you in a special way?
  - b. The psalmist David eventually dared to combine the term "holy" and "Spirit" (Psalm 51:11), as if to say, "Aha! Now I get it! The same God who controls the fearsome power of a tornado also wants to caress my cheek, hold me in loving arms, and be as close to me as breath and breeze. Jesus grabbed hold of this oxymoron term and used it often, challenging his disciples to "receive the Holy Spirit." Then when Jesus died, the curtain that separated the inner sanctum of the temple (where the Ark had been) from ordinary people was torn in two by an invisible hand (Mt. 27:51). What do you think we're supposed to learn from that?
5. Read Luke 11:9-13, John 20:19-22, and John 3:1-8. Based on these passages, try to answer the following questions.
- a. How do we "receive the Holy Spirit?"
  - b. When someone receives the Holy Spirit, how does that affect them? How is life changed when we receive the Holy Spirit?
  - c. Think back to the video clip Jeff showed on Sunday of the prayer prayed by the little boy in the movie "Tree of Life." The little boy whispered, "Where do you live? Are you watching me? I want to know what you are. I want to see what you see." Basically, he was inviting the intimate presence of the Holy Spirit into his life. Do you feel you have received the Holy Spirit? Why or why not?

*Next week we'll explore how, once received, we can begin to relate to the Holy Spirit on a practical.*