

Shalom AZ Ministries

In Pursuit of Israel's Redemption



"Recapturing the Reality of Our Identity: Holy Ones"

Rabbi Cosmo Panzetta

Devotion and Discussion Questions

Key Texts (TLV): Phil. 1:1-2; Ex. 34:6-7; Is. 6:1-8; Lev. 11:45; 1 Pet. 1:14-16; Eph. 4:1-2

We live in a world filled with identifiers. We identify ourselves by where we live, what we do, where we come from, what congregation we attend, what movement we belong to, or even what people around us think of us. We might say, "I'm an American," "I'm Jewish," "I'm Messianic," "I'm a Christian," or "I'm from Phoenix, Atlanta, Florida, or Edinburgh." None of those things are necessarily wrong, but when Paul begins his letter to the congregation in Philippi, he reaches beneath all those secondary identifiers and reminds these believers of something far more fundamental. He does not simply address them as "the Philippians." Philippi is where they live. It is their location. It is perhaps even their mission field. But it is not their deepest identity. Paul writes to "*all the kedoshim in Messiah Yeshua who are in Philippi*" (Phil. 1:1). They are *kedoshim*—holy ones, saints. THAT is who they are.

That is something we desperately need to recapture. Paul's identifier for the people of God is not built around geography, politics, culture, denomination, or religious reputation. He calls them holy ones. In Greek, *hagiois* (ἁγίοις); in Hebrew, *kedoshim* (קְדוֹשִׁים). The word carries the idea of being separated, set apart, belonging to a different order of things—living in another sphere. That does not mean walking around with the attitude, "I'm better than everyone else because I'm a saint." No. It means recognizing that we have been set apart to God, made new in Messiah Yeshua, and called to reflect His character in the place where He has put us. The great question of this passage, then, is wonderfully simple and deeply challenging: **Do you know who you are?**

1. YOU ARE HOLY ONES

Paul begins, "*Paul and Timothy, slaves of Messiah Yeshua, to all the kedoshim in Messiah Yeshua who are in Philippi*" (Phil. 1:1). Notice the contrast. Paul and Timothy identify themselves as *douloi*—servants, even slaves, of Messiah Yeshua—while they address the believers as *kedoshim*, holy ones. Paul is not establishing a spiritual hierarchy in which he is "Saint Paul" and everyone else is beneath him. He humbly says, in effect, "We are servants of Messiah, and you are His holy ones." This is the identifier Paul repeatedly uses for congregations. These people have been called, made holy, set apart, and brought into a new identity that comes from God Himself.

To understand what it means for us to be holy, however, we have to begin with the holiness of God. God is *Kadosh* (קָדוֹשׁ). He is set apart. He is unlike any other. He is, as the phrase goes, "wholly other." He is in a category of one. When He reveals His Name, He reveals His character: "*ADONAI, ADONAI, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, and abundant in lovingkindness (chesed, חֶסֶד) and truth*" (Ex. 34:6). His holiness encompasses the fullness of who He is—His perfect love, perfect truth, perfect righteousness, perfect justice, perfect mercy, and perfect faithfulness. To be called a holy one, then, is not merely to be identified by the things we refuse to do. Holiness is much bigger than a list of prohibitions. God has set us apart to Himself so that His beautiful, unique character increasingly becomes visible in us.

2. YOU ARE HOLY ONES IN MESSIAH YESHUA

There is something vitally important in Paul's wording: these are the *kedoshim* "in Messiah Yeshua." Their holiness is not something they produced or achieved. No religious organization can make someone a saint. We cannot make ourselves saintly by working harder, appearing more religious, or finally reaching some imagined level of spiritual perfection. God makes holy ones. Through faith in Messiah Yeshua, the record that stood against us has been dealt with, and we have been made righteous—"sanctified"—what we might almost call "righteous-ized." Holiness, or sainthood in the biblical sense, is not first an accomplished perfection; it is an established position. Where is that position? **In Messiah.** If you have placed your faith and trust in Yeshua, you have been set apart to God. He calls you a holy one.

Isaiah gives us a beautiful picture of this. When he encounters ADONAI in Is. 6 and hears the seraphim cry, "*Holy, holy, holy, is ADONAI-Tzva'ot! The whole earth is full of His glory!*" (Is. 6:3), Isaiah suddenly sees himself clearly: "*...I am a man of unclean lips, and I am dwelling among a people of unclean lips.*" (Isaiah 6:5). In the light of God's character, there is nowhere to hide. He realizes, "I am much more like the people around me than I am like Him." Yet God does not leave Isaiah lying in his uncleanness. The coal from the altar touches his lips, his iniquity is taken away, and his sin is atoned for. Then Isaiah is sent. **That is the pattern of grace: encounter His holiness, recognize our need, receive His cleansing, and then live from the new reality He has established.** We do not become holy so that God will receive us; rather having been received, cleansed, and set apart by Him, we begin learning how to live like the people He has declared us to be.

3. YOU ARE HOLY ONES IN _____ (PHILIPPI)

Being made holy does not remove these believers from Philippi. He calls them *kedoshim* in Philippi. They are of another sphere, but they are still living right there in that Roman colony. They are saints **in that place**. That means their holiness has a location and a mission. They are to become a sanctifying presence in the place where God has put them. The same is true of us. You may be a holy one in Phoenix, Atlanta, Missouri, Florida, America, Edinburgh, or anywhere else the Lord has placed you. Your environment does not determine your deepest identity. You have been made new. You belong to Him. Yet precisely because you belong to Him, you have been sent into that particular place to display something of His character there.

Peter expresses the same reality when he writes, "*Like obedient children, do not be shaped by the cravings you had formerly in your ignorance. Instead, just like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in everything you do*" (1 Pet. 1:14–15). Do not go back to "you 1.0." Do not allow yourself to be pressed again into the old *schema*, the old shape, the old cravings of who you were before you knew Him. Instead, let His character shape your conduct. Holiness should appear in our relationships, our conversations, our business dealings, our homes, our reactions, our social media, our private thoughts, and our treatment of people who frustrate us. It looks like truth, compassion, purity, righteousness, love, mercy, and being slow to anger. "*Kedoshim you shall be, for I am kadosh*" (1 Pet. 1:16). We are set apart because we belong to the One who is set apart.

CONCLUSION

Paul's opening words to the Philippians are much more than a polite greeting. He is reminding them who they are: *kedoshim in Messiah Yeshua who are in Philippi*. Lydia is a saint. The jailer

and his family are saints. The unnamed servant girl whom Yeshua set free is a saint. These are ordinary people whose lives have been transformed by an extraordinary God. They have been brought out of bondage and into freedom, set apart to Him, and now called to walk out that identity. Paul continues, “*Grace to you and shalom from God our Father and the Lord Yeshua the Messiah*” (Phil. 1:2). They will not live this new life through their own strength. They live in His grace, His favor, His power, and His shalom.

Maybe today you have forgotten who you are. Perhaps you have allowed your failures, your past, your politics, your occupation, your reputation, your struggles, or even your religious label to become your primary identifier. Come back to what God says. If you have placed your faith in Messiah Yeshua, you are His. You have been set apart. You are a holy one. And perhaps there are areas where your life has begun taking on the old *schema* again—old reactions, old cravings, old attitudes, old compromises. Bring those things before Him today. Receive again the reality of His grace, surrender whatever does not reflect His character, and ask the Holy Spirit to make the character of Yeshua increasingly visible in you. You do not have to become someone else in order to follow Him. You need to walk in the fullness of who He has already declared you to be. **Recapture the reality of your identity. You are a holy one. Now walk in it.**

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think Paul calls the believers in Philippi *kedoshim* rather than simply identifying them as “Philippians”?
2. How does understanding God as “wholly other”—perfect in love, truth, righteousness, justice, and mercy—broaden our understanding of holiness?
3. What is the difference between trying to **make yourself holy** and learning to **walk as someone God has already set apart in Messiah Yeshua**?
4. What labels or identities—career, nationality, politics, past failures, success, reputation, or something else—are most likely to compete with your identity in Messiah today?
5. Where do you see yourself being tempted to return to “you 1.0”—old habits, reactions, cravings, attitudes, or ways of thinking—and what would it look like to reflect Yeshua in that area instead?

CLOSING PRAYER

ADONAI, You are holy. There is none like You. You are perfect in love, mercy, truth, righteousness, justice, and compassion. Thank You that through Messiah Yeshua You have brought us out of bondage, made us new, and set us apart to Yourself. Thank You that our identity is not ultimately determined by our past, our failures, our location, our culture, or the labels others place upon us. We belong to You.

Help us recapture the reality of who we are. Keep us from returning to the old *schema* and the old cravings of who we once were. Let the character of Yeshua overflow through us in everything we do—in our words, relationships, choices, attitudes, and responses. Make us a sanctifying presence wherever You have placed us. May we walk in a manner worthy of the calling we have received, filled with Your grace and shalom. We are Your *kedoshim*. Teach us to walk as Your holy ones. In the Name of Yeshua, amen.

B'Shem Yeshua, In the name of Yeshua, amen.