“IT’S A BIT CLOUDY TODAY”

Psalm 99 February 15, 2026

When I watch the morning news, it is usually the weather report that I am most interested in. Afterall, we live in northeast PA and the pattern changes frequently. It can be 30 degrees one moment and then drop to -1. We can wake up to a bright sunny morning and by noon the rain clouds move in. Of course, that keeps the day exciting, I mean who wants to live in a place where it is always sunny and 80 degrees? Yuck!

In school we learned about the atmosphere, the water cycle and clouds. For instance, there are three main atmospheric layers, the mesospheric layer, the stratospheric layer and the tropospheric layer. Of course, if a cloud touches the ground, we call it fog. There are different cloud types such as cirrus, nimbus, stratus, cumulus all determined by the altitude in which they are normally found. Just for further classification and test questions, we learned the cloud types were also grouped by their forms: sheets, wisps, patches, rolls, ripples, heaps and towers.

This may be far more information about clouds than you want to know this morning. However, it’s interesting how often in scripture when there is a physical manifestation of God it is in the form of a cloud. This happens quite a bit with Moses and the Israelites. They were guided by a cloud by day. God’s presence was a cloud over the Tabernacle tent. When they arrive at Mt. Siani a cloud covers it. Abraham had a vision of God in a cloud. After King Solomon built the Temple, a glorious cloud filled it, that was so overwhelming all the priests had to leave the building. John’s

vision in Revelation is God above a cloud and Paul's description of the rapture said we would meet God in the clouds.

Let's not forget on this transfiguration Sunday we read, "**Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the beloved; listen to him!**"

That's a lot of cloud cover! It begs the question, "**Why a cloud?**" Of all the options God could take, why appear in a cloud? Please note God is not a cloud, it is more like God's covering. But still!

I. GOD IS HOLY

Once a seeker after truth came to a saint for guidance.

'Tell me please, wise one, how did you become holy?'

'Two words.'

'And what are they, please?'

'Right choices.'

'And how does one learn to choose correctly?'

'One word.'

'May I know it, please?'

'Growth.'

'How does one grow?'

'Two words.'

'What are those words, pray tell me?'

'Wrong choices.'"

Twice, our Psalmist declares, "**Holy is he!**" Holiness describes who God is and yet its difficult to define holiness. We work to be holy, but God is holy. In other words, God is what we are not. While we may have been made in God's image, we are not of the same substance or being. This creates a certain separation or distance between us and God. It also makes it impossible for us to picture what absolute holiness looks like. Perhaps that is why God commands us to make no image of God. No painting or film or any other medium can capture the glory, power, majesty, and holiness of God. We are unable to know the fullness of God. It would be utterly overwhelming even to catch a glimpse.

Perhaps the reason God often appears in a cloud is because of its ethereal nature. Clouds are constantly moving, changing shape, size, and color. Clouds can loom large and menacing, yet if you wave your hand through them it seems like almost nothing is there. They are present, but you can't shape or control them. They blow where they will. Just like clouds, there is a certain mystery to God. We might hear God's voice or feel God's presence but much of God is beyond us, God is holy. The best we can do is describe God's character, actions, and purpose as revealed to us by God in nature, in our experience, and through scripture. **Psalm 99** lifts back the heavenly cloud just a little that we might catch a glimpse of this holy God.

1. LORD AND KING

In Edinburgh Castle, Scotland, you will find an oblong block of red sandstone called the Stone of Scone which means the Stone of Destiny. It is considered an ancient symbol of Scottish monarchy and the Kingdom of Scotland, with its first recorded use being in 1249 for the coronation of **Alexander III of Scotland**.

However, in 1296 the army of Edward I of England captured it and placed it under the Coronation Chair at Westminster Abby. Edward and subsequent British sovereigns have been crowned on it. Edward I sought to claim his right to rule over Scotland by putting the stone and thus the people of Scotland under him. He symbolically sat on them.

Listen to the Psalmist, "**The Lord is king; let the peoples tremble! He sits enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth quake! The Lord is great in Zion; he is exalted over the peoples. Let them praise your great and awesome name. Holy is he!**"

The most repeated word for God not only in Psalm 99 but in all of scripture is **Lord**. It is used over **6,800** times, including by Jesus. The most common words for **Lord** are Yahweh, Elohim, Adonai, El Shaddai, El Elyon. Each of these names has their own nuances, but all of them refer to God being the **Lord, Master, Almighty, and Most High**. They allude to God's power, strength, supremacy, and majesty. The word "**LORD**" is always written in capital letters, meaning **Lord of all other lords**.

The **sitting enthroned upon the cherubim** reference means all the other gods, heavenly beings, powers, nations, and rulers everywhere have

been put in their place, under God. The Lord sits on them. This God is the one who shakes and shapes the world. This God is beyond challenge, resistance, or explanation. God's purposes will be worked out and the only proper response to God's sovereignty is doxology and celebration. God is not to be mocked or taken for granted. God is the Lord. Lest we get overwhelmed by this power imagery of God the next sections of the Psalm are crucial and bring balance to our understanding.

II. LORD OF JUSTICE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

One of my favorite musicals is the Lion King. The musical scores are rhythmic, the costumes are visually stunning, and the story resonates with our human nature. The Lion King centers on a lion cub by the name of Simba, who is next in line for the throne. He and his best friend Nala, another lion cub, go on adventures together. In one of those, he sings a song, "**I just can't wait to be king**". The song reveals that neither Simba nor Nala really understand what it means to be king. Simba thinks being king is about telling people what to do, about being admired and bowed down to, and doing whatever you want. He doesn't think he needs the wisdom and guidance of others. Simba has no idea what it means to be a responsible leader. He's a cub after all!

In contrast to Simba our Psalmist sings, "**Mighty King, lover of justice, you have established equity; you have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob.**" Yes, God is the Almighty, full of power and authority, but how God uses that power makes all the difference. In this

case God uses this lordly power to **restore and redeem**. God loves compassionate justice and works with **recreative** love to set the world right. Further, the psalmist tells us that God has established equity. This means God has provided the necessary resources that should be available to **everyone**. It also means that no one person or corporation is to have a monopoly on the basics of life. Equity means the fair distribution of goods to sustain life is for all.

This challenges our idea of capitalism. **George Everett Ross, Akron, Ohio wrote**, "There is no question: Positive thinking may motivate a man to rise from the laundry room to the boardroom. No doubt about it: It works. But we wonder: Is that why Jesus died upon the cross and rose from death and ever liveth to make intercession for us at the throne of Almighty God? Is that why God, from nothingness, made Orion and the Pleiades? Is that why ten thousand times ten thousand martyrs washed their robes in the blood of the lamb -- so that one or two of us can scramble to the top of the heap?"

We live in a country where the top 1% holds approximately 32% of total US wealth. While 62% of US adults own stocks the wealth distribution is skewed, with the top 10% owning 87% and the bottom 50% owning just 1%. Texas statehouse representative and Christian James Talarico said, "**The reason poverty exists is not because we can't feed the poor but that we can't satisfy the rich.**"

Thank goodness we have a God who is not about amassing but giving, who doesn't cater to the rich and powerful but issues judgment and warning, who executes justice and right relationship with his people so that all might prosper and experience life in full. Again it elicits a worship response. "**Holy is he!**"

III. INTERCESSION

Over the years I have had people ask me to be a reference for them. Some were trying to get into college, others were applying for a job, and others were working on a scholarship. I am always honored to be asked and do my best to give a worthy reference. It is one way to intercede and act on behalf of another person.

Greg Gaines, "At the core of prayer lies the belief in divine intervention. It is a petition to a higher power, a recognition that our lives are intertwined with something beyond ourselves. Intercessory prayer, specifically, involves seeking divine intervention on behalf of others, recognizing the interconnectedness of humanity and the potential for miracles."

Lastly, the Psalmist sings, "**They cried to the Lord, and he answered them. He spoke to them in the pillar of cloud; they kept his decrees and the statutes that he gave them. O Lord our God, you answered them; you were a forgiving God to them but an avenger of their wrongdoing.**"

One of the duties of the kings of Israel was to respond to the petitions of the helpless, the poor, and the powerless. They cried out to the king because that was the only place they could turn and be heard. When we look at this mysterious, almighty, cloud hidden Lord, it is amazing to think we can cry out and God answers. Here we see God's freedom to forgive yet that does not negate the importance of obedience to God's requirements for right living. God intervenes in the life of this world because God loves this world and is more involved than we realize.

When I was taking courses on Spiritual Direction one of the questions was, "**What's your image of God**?" It's a vitally important question, because our image of God is the lens we see the world, ourselves, and others with. What we believe impacts everything.

I would close my cloud sermon with this warning. Be careful of your claims about God, for they are often more about us than about God. Be careful not to pick a single aspect of God's character and leave out others. Be careful not to attempt to shape God as you like, instead of being shaped by God as God likes. Be careful not to claim to be God's voice when you have not listened to God's voice to you. Remember God is Holy! After all, our image of God is cloudy at best and best seen through the lens of Jesus Christ our risen Lord. **Amen**.

Psalm 99

1 The Lord is king; let the peoples tremble! He sits enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth quake!

2 The Lord is great in Zion; he is exalted over all the peoples.

3 Let them praise your great and awesome name. Holy is he!

4 Mighty King, lover of justice, you have established equity; you have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob.

5 Extol the Lord our God; worship at his footstool. Holy is he!

6 Moses and Aaron were among his priests, Samuel also was among those who called on his name. They cried to the Lord, and he answered them.

7 He spoke to them in the pillar of cloud; they kept his decrees and the statutes that he gave them.

8 O Lord our God, you answered them; you were a forgiving God to them but an avenger of their wrongdoings.

9 Extol the Lord our God, and worship at his holy mountain, for the Lord our God is holy.

This is the Word of the Lord.
Thanks be To God.