

Let everything that has breath
praise the Lord. Praise the Lord!

Psalm 150:6

Praise Points

with Karen Holland

Take Off Your Shoes

“Earth is crammed with heaven,
And every bush is aflame with God
But only those who see, take off their shoes
The rest sit around it and pluck blackberries.” – Elizabeth Browning

Recently this profound quote by Elizabeth Browning caught my eye. I knew the flaming bush and taking off of shoes was referring to Moses and the burning bush. In Acts 7:33 Stephen quotes Exodus 3:5 when he says, . . . *The LORD said to him, Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.*

The phrase holy ground points to the fact that God is not limited to a particular locale or a specific place. It appears that the phrase ‘holy ground’ from Acts 7:33 is the place where God is active in revealing Himself. The place where he is active in revealing himself is a holy place. The word *קֹדֶשׁ* (qodesh, “holy”) indicates “set apart, distinct, unique.” What made a mountain or another place holy was the fact that God chose that place to reveal himself or to reside among his people. Because God was in this place, the ground was different – it was holy.

The removal of sandals was, and still is in the East, a sign of humility and reverence in the presence of the Holy One. It was a way of excluding the dust and dirt of the world. I didn’t see before the whole significance of the Lord’s command to take off your shoes. I saw it as obedience and as a sign of reverence, worship and humility. I didn’t see that it was a symbol for removing or excluding the dirt and sin of the world or that it was really a command linked to preparing your heart.

Holy ground is holy, ‘set apart, unique, distinct’ because this is ground where the Lord chooses to reveal Himself; ‘but only to those who see, take off their shoes’. Who can ‘see’ God? Who can ‘stand’ on holy ground?

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Matthew 5:8

Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive blessing from the LORD, and righteousness from the God of his salvation. This is Jacob, the generation of those who seek Him who seek Your face. Selah

Psalm 24:3-6

For thus says the high and lofty One—He Who inhabits eternity, Whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, but with him also who is of a thoroughly penitent and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble and to revive the heart of the thoroughly penitent [bruised with sorrow for sin]

Isaiah 57:15 AMP

It appears that taking off your shoes is a symbol for a heart willing to humble itself before the Lord and be cleansed. This is where the Lord dwells and reveals Himself. This is holy ground!

And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness which come through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Philippians 1:9-11

According to Strong's Concordance of the Bible the Greek word heilikrines is used for sincere in Philippians 1:10. It means pure, sincere, unsullied. Looking more closely at this word, we see it is actually a compound word. The first part comes from heile (the sun's ray), the second from krino (to judge). So the two parts together means to be found pure when unfolded and examined by the sun's light! What a beautiful picture of a sincere heart, a heart willing to 'take off its shoes'! The heart of one with a "sincere" devotion to the Lord will be found pure when examined and judged by the Son, the light of the world. It will be a heart that has willingly submitted to Lord's searching and cleansing.

Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean [ceremonially]; wash me, and I shall [in reality] be whiter than snow. . . . Hide Your face from my sins and blot out all my guilt and iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right, persevering, and steadfast spirit within me. Cast me not away from Your presence and take not Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

Psalms 51:7, 9-12

These humble hearts that have willingly unfolded in the Son's light to be cleansed are the place where the Lord dwells. These hearts are also places of joy. The tabernacle of the righteous is where the voice of rejoicing is heard.

The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tent {tabernacles} of the righteous; The right hand of the LORD does valiantly {mighty things, conquers}. The right hand of the LORD is exalted {lifted up}; The right hand of the LORD does valiantly. . . . Open to me the gates of righteousness; I will go through them, And I will praise the LORD. This is the gate of the LORD, Through which the righteous shall enter. I will praise {give thanks, confess the name of God} You, For You have answered me, And have become my salvation.

Psalms 118:15-16, 19-21

'This is the gate': Jesus is the gate for His sheep. The Lord Jesus Christ is our salvation. He is the main gate through which the righteous enter to find salvation. He is the gate to enter in and out of His pasture. (John 10:7-9) There are also gates of thanksgiving and praise that the saved go through to enter His presence. (Psalm 100, Isaiah 60:18)

Let's look back now at the quote by Elizabeth Browning:

Earth is crammed with heaven, and every bush is aflame with God
The evidence of our Lord Jesus Christ is everywhere in His creation.

But only those who see, take off their shoes
Only those who choose to look for Him with pure sincere hearts will acknowledge Him, bow down and enter His gates in joyful worship.

The rest sit around it and pluck blackberries
The rest are consumed in their daily lives, fail to see Him and take Him for granted.

Where is your heart today? Are you busy with the blackberries or will you choose to take off your shoes, bow down and joyously worship Him?

Lord Jesus, help us to set our hearts on You
To humbly seek Your face {take off our shoes}.
Please create in us clean hearts and pure hands -Psalms 24:3-6, 51:10
That we may lift them up and bless You, Lord. -Lamentations 3:41; Psalm 134:2

BLESS (AFFECTIONATELY, gratefully praise) the Lord, O my soul; and all that is [deepest] within me, bless His holy name!

Psalm 103:1

Lift up your heads, O you gates! And be lifted up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in.

Psalm 24:7

I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the confident hope He has given to those He called—His holy people who are His rich and glorious inheritance.

Ephesians 1:18

Psalm 100

A Psalm of Thanksgiving.

1 Make a joyful shout to the LORD, all you lands! 2 Serve the LORD with gladness; Come before His presence with singing. 3 Know that the LORD, He is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; We are His people and the sheep of His pasture. 4 Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, And into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name. 5 For the LORD is good; His mercy is everlasting, And His truth endures to all generations.