

## Holy

### Introduction

Justin Bieber is considered the prince of pop as well as the king of teen pop and is worth an estimated \$285 million dollars. He was discovered after his mother posted some of his songs on YouTube and by the time he was only fifteen years old, he had his first #1 hit with the debut of his song, “One Time.” Bieber’s three most popular songs of the more than 70 he has recorded include “Baby” (2010), “Despacito” (2017), and “Sorry” (2015). His song “Baby” was featured on his first album and has had a stunning 2.5 billion views on YouTube. Justin Bieber was featured in Luis Fonsi and Daddy Yankee’s popular song “Despacito” in 2017 and is on the short list of songs for remaining on the Top Billboard Charts for 16 weeks. His 2015 song titled, “Sorry” was a #1 hit on the charts for three weeks and has received 3 billion views on YouTube; the song serves as an apology from Bieber to his fans. Here is what he said of his most popular song to date:

*"I just want to let people know that for a while I feel like I lost my purpose and I'm gaining it back... and I feel like it's so important that everyone finds their purpose... so basically my message is that no matter how far you feel away from who you were, or who you think you were, or whether you're lost, there's always room to grow and always room to find your purpose."*

I share Bieber’s explanation of the message of his song to highlight the tension, struggles, and temptations that he faced as a child popstar who continues to experience a stardom not unlike some of the greats before him. What you may not know is that Justin Bieber grew up under the influence of the Church. In numerous interviews throughout his music career, Bieber attested to his faith in Jesus, but with the growth of his fame, he also struggled with practicing what he said he believed.

After reaching an all-time low at the age of 19, he was on a path of self-destruction and if it were not for the role of Judah Smith and other Christians who demonstrated what it looked like to follow Jesus and how that should affect your relationships, he would be in a very different place than where he is at today. Listen to what Bieber said of the dark season that led to him fully committing to following Jesus with his life:

“I was just living in this shame, living in all this sort of stuff in my past and I wasn't able to move on,” he said. “... [Now] the way I look at my relationship with God and with Jesus is I'm not trying to earn God's love by doing good things. God has already loved me for who I am, before I did anything to earn and deserve it. It's a free gift by accepting Jesus and just giving your life to Him.

“And what He did is the gift – the forgiveness is the thing that we look at and, you know, ‘I'm going to worship You, God, because You gave me something so good.’ And so you

live that life of like, 'I don't want to cheat on my wife, not because it's the right thing to do but because I don't want to hurt her.' See the difference there?"<sup>1</sup>

Bieber described his salvation in the following way: "Jesus found me in my dirt and pulled me out." There is much more to Bieber's story of how he came to genuine faith in Jesus, but one thing is sure, there has been a remarkable change in his life since the day he discovered that his faith in Jesus meant that he must follow Jesus. It is Bieber's faith in Jesus and his relationship with his wife, Hailey Baldwin that leads me to his song, "Holy."

According to Bieber, "Holy" is a love letter to his wife and how faith brought them together. In the video, which stars Ryan Destiny as Bieber's love interest, the music video is really about the love he and Hailey share that is strengthened by their faith in Jesus. The two dated briefly in 2015, but ran into each other in June 2018 at a Christian conference not long after Bieber had recommitted his life to following Jesus. They were engaged a month later and were married in September of that same year, and in 2020 both decided to get baptized together, "to declare their faith together with their friends." The reason why they married so fast was because Bieber decided that he would not have sex again until after he was married, which is also a testament to his desire to really follow Jesus instead of just talking about it.

The song, "Holy," debuted on September 18, 2020 and is listed on Billboard in the top 100 best songs of 2020. The music video seems to suggest that faith and love can survive even a global pandemic; the video has received over 175 million views so far. There is a reason why people love this song and the songs we will review throughout this sermon series.

### **What We All Long For**

A twenty-seven yearlong study was published by the *Journal of the American Medical Association* by a team at the University of Michigan researchers, what they found was that one of the secrets to long life was living with a sense of purpose and meaning. The study showed that, "working with a sense of purpose and meaning leads to far greater engagement, motivation, productivity, and retention."<sup>2</sup> Some find their purpose in work, others find purpose from their children, others it is in their culture, and for some, like Justin Bieber, it can be in their talent and skill.

The truth is that whatever you find your purpose in: that job, that thing, or that person is only as secure and lasting as that job, that thing, or that person. If your purpose is found in your work, then what happens when you can no longer work. If your purpose is found in a thing, then what happens when you lose that thing? If your purpose is found in another person, then what happens when that person is gone? If your purpose is found in your skill or talents, then what happens if you are no longer able to practice those skills or talents? The message of the Psalms is that you were made for more than the job, the thing, the person, or the skills and talents you possess.

---

<sup>1</sup> See Justin Bieber's testimony on YouTube: "Justin Bieber: Journey To Jesus."

<sup>2</sup> JAMA Network: "Association Between Life Purpose and Mortality Among US Adults Older Than 50 Years" (May, 24, 2019).

The word holy can mean “righteous,” it can mean “consecrated,” and it can mean, “sacred.” The reason why I think Holy resonates with so many of Bieber’s fans is because we all want something more that cannot be destroyed, that is sacred, and will never grow old. I think “Holy” would have been popular regardless of the time it was released, but in the midst of a global pandemic where so many people feel robbed of what they considered sacred, Bieber’s song communicates what many wish they had.

### **The God We Were Made for Meets Us Where We Are**

No creature or idol can give you what only God can provide. What is true of every idol is that every promise it makes is conditioned on your ability to make what it promises your reality. This is why idols can never satisfy and ultimately rob you of the life God intends for you to enjoy. If you call out to your idol albeit for a job, a thing, a person, or dream... you will be forced to go to it because the idol has no ability to bring you what you really need. However, according to Psalm 4, there is only one God who is able to come to you because he alone is God and he is not inanimate, or as the prophet Isaiah wrote: **“To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name; by the greatness of his might and because he is strong in power, not one is missing”** (Isaiah 40:25–26).

This brings me to Psalm 4. This Psalm was written after King David was driven out of his own kingdom by his older son Absalom. Absalom did everything that he could to undermine his father’s role as the king of Israel, which eventually resulted in David fleeing Jerusalem in an effort to avoid a coup (see 2 Sam. 15). It is one thing to have an argument with your child, it is quite another thing when that child’s intention is to have you killed. It was during that very dark season in David’s life that I believe he wrote Psalm 4. David begins with a plea: **“Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness! You have given me relief when I was in distress. Be gracious to me and hear my prayer”** (Psalm 4:1)!

There was only one who David believed could rescue, and it was David’s God. What the opening verse of this Psalm teaches us is that God is not impersonal, he is not a figment of the imagination, and he was not created. David understood this because of the ways God delivered him in the past. Do you remember David’s encounter with Goliath (see 1 Sam. 17)? It wasn’t because of David’s amazing fighting skills that he won his battle with Goliath. When David faced the giant as a young man, he explained to Goliath how and why he would slay the giant. When Goliath saw that it would be David who would fight as Israel’s champion, he said to David: **“Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks? Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the beasts of the field.”** Then David answered the giant:

**You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head... that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the LORD saves not with the sword and spear. For the battle is the LORD’s, and he will give you into our hand”** (1 Sam. 17:43-47).

While in hiding, David was able to look back on his past and remember those moments when it was clear that God intervened on his behalf. No matter what anyone else thought about David, what really mattered was what God thought of him, for the Psalm continues: **“O men, how long shall my honor be turned into shame? How long will you love vain words and seek after lies”** (v. 2)? You see, every one of us has a past, including David! When this Psalm was written, it was written after David committed adultery with Bathsheba and it happened after he tried to cover up his affair by having Bathsheba’s husband murdered. The mess with Absalom was because of David’s past sins (see 2 Sam. 11:1-12:25). Although David was deeply sorry for his sins and repented of them, he still had to live with the consequences of those sins. However, not only did God not abandon David, he continued to love him.

One of my favorite passages in the Bible is found in Micah, which shows us how a good God responds to the sins of his children; it is a passage that illustrates how God could continue his relationship with David even after his horrible sins: **“Rejoice not over me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall rise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me. I will bear the indignation of the Lord because I have sinned against him, until he pleads my cause and executes judgment for me. He will bring me out to the light; I shall look upon his vindication”** (Micah 7:8–9).

### **God Loves Us Too Much to Leave Us the Way He Found Us**

I love how David continued his song while he was pursued by his child and an army who wanted him dead. It was wrong for Absalom to treat his father the way he did, and David had every right to be angry with those who chased him out of his kingdom and pursued him, but verses 4-5 show us that something had changed in David; he was a different man then he was in the days that he met Bathsheba. Here is what David says that I believe serve as the lyrical linchpin of his song: **“Be angry, and do not sin; ponder in your own hearts on you beds, and be silent. Offer right sacrifices, and put your trust in the LORD”** (vv. 4-5). In his devotional, *In the Lord I Take Refuge*, Dane Ortlund shares his thoughts on these verses:

David is expressing the battle that rages within our hearts at night as we lay our head down on the pillow. On one side is stacked up all of the clamoring accusations and misunderstandings and painful words of the day—of actual people in our lives or of demonic attack or of our own fallen minds. On the other side is the Lord. Both beckon to us; both invite us to listen. In the darkness of that moment, David makes up his mind: he will trust in the Lord (v. 5).<sup>3</sup>

So, when everything in David’s life seemed to have been taken from him, what he had left was the God who continued to love him, who in a very real sense promises to never let his people go. In a very real sense, David experienced what it really means to be held by the One who is truly holy, and it had little to do with what David was able to do. Listen to how David concludes:

**There are many who say, “Who will show us some good? Lift up the light of your face upon us, O Lord!” You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound. In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.** (Psalm 4:6–8)

---

<sup>3</sup> Dane C. Ortlund, *In The Lord I Take Refuge* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway; 2021), p. 18.

Do you hear what David is saying in the last verses of his song? Even though he seemed to have nothing, he had more joy in his heart than those who seemed to have everything. Because David was held by a God who truly loved him, he understood that the safest place to be was in the hands of the Almighty (v. 8)!

### **Conclusion**

There is really only one critique I would like to make about Bieber's song and that is with the line: **"I know I ain't leavin' you like I know he ain't leavin' us, I know we believe in God and I know God believes in us."** The reality is that God knows our hearts better than we do. Our hearts are fickle and capable of evil, yet he pursues us anyway. The love of God is evidence in the sending of his Son. As Bieber said in an interview, "Jesus found me and pulled me out of my dirt." This is what Jesus meant when he said: **"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him"** (John 3:16–17).

In a world plagued by a horrible virus, polarized by shady politics and politicians, all while we share in an experience that what we hold dear could be gone by tomorrow, God sent his son to save you from your sins and to reconcile you to himself so that you can know what it means to be held by a Holy God who is the only one able to keep the promise, **"I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you"** (Josh. 1:5; Heb. 13:5).

Whatever it is that is in your past, whatever it is that frightens you today, whatever it is that people may be saying about you, whatever voices you hear whispering or shouting that you are too dirty to be loved by a Holy God, I want you to hear the words of Jesus in conclusion to this sermon: **"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one"** (John 10:27–30).