

The Glory of God's Presence
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Have you ever walked out of a church service you thought was dead where you felt nothing, only to overhear someone else say, "Wow, what an awesome service! God really showed up today." And you wonder, "Were we in the same service? I didn't feel a thing."

Years ago I experienced times where it seemed everyone was experiencing the presence of God except me. I just chalked it up to them being more emotional than me. But I had a hunger to experience the presence of God. Over time, I learned how to discern the presence of God. I've learned it's not a feeling – it's a spiritual awareness that can be developed.

Today we are finishing up our series on Days of Awe. I'm preaching a message entitled The Glory of God's Presence.

The awe of God and the glory of God always go together. One of the first places we see this in the Bible is in Exodus 15:11 when the Children of Israel had been delivered from Egypt and crossed the Red Sea. They recognized the power and glory of God and said:

Who among the gods is like You, O Lord? Who is like You — majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?

Today I'll teach you how to overcome the hindrance of not recognizing the presence of God. Not being aware of God's presence will hinder your worship. You can praise from afar. You can give thanks from a distance. But worship is up close and personal.

I want to start by comforting those of you who have problems recognizing God's presence by telling you there were people in the Bible who did not recognize the presence of God. For instance, Genesis 28:10-19 says:

Now Jacob went out from Beersheba and went toward Haran. So he came to a certain place and stayed there all night, because the sun had set. And he took one of the stones of that place and put it at his head, and he lay down in that place to sleep. Then he dreamed, and behold, a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And behold, the Lord stood above it... Then God spoke a blessing over Jacob and his descendants.

Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it." And he was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!"

It's possible for God to be in a place and we don't know it. Jacob was nowhere – He was on his way to somewhere, but he was nowhere - in a place with no name – just called “a certain place.” It was just a wide spot in the road on the way to where he was going. What He did not know what God was going to turn nowhere into somewhere. It was known forever after as Bethel – the House of God.

You may feel like you are nowhere, but God can turn your nowhere into somewhere in an instant. God can turn your nothing into something. All it takes is for Him to show up.

Jacob laid down on the cold hard ground in the middle of nowhere with nothing but a cold hard rock for his pillow and God showed up. Please understand that your surroundings don't dictate whether or not God shows up.

You can be in a good place when God shows up or you can be between a rock and a hard place and God can show up and change everything overnight.

You can be in a cold place and God shows up and speaks to you.

You can have a rock for your pillow yet dream dreams where God gives you fresh vision for your future.

Don't give up in your hard times. God can meet you there. You may be just one night away from God showing up. And when God shows up, like Jacob, you will be in awe. It will be an awesome encounter that changes you forever!

So, it's possible God is in some situations right now and we don't see it. The word of the Lord to you in your situation is wait on the Lord and praise Him where you are! He will manifest His presence to you!

It's possible God is already where are you just don't recognize it. In Exodus 3:1-4, Moses saw a bush on fire, but it did not burn up.

Then Moses said, “I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn.” So when the Lord saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.”

There are things that happen in our lives that look strange. There are things we see that we don't understand. At those times we can choose to walk on by or turn aside. But, if we walk on by we miss out on what God is doing.

When did God speak to Moses? When Moses turned aside to look – then God spoke. God didn't yell at Moses as He was passing by, “Hey, Mo! It's the Lord speaking. Come on over here and let's talk.”

No, Moses drew near first. God responds when we draw near.

We enter a greater dimension of God's presence when we draw near. James 4:8 says:

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.

To get into God's presence, we must draw near and we must respond to the voice of God. It's possible God's in a place and we don't know it. It's even possible to be standing in the presence of the resurrected Christ and totally miss out on it! Matthew 28:16-17 says that when Jesus ascended to heaven:

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted.

I don't want to be someone who misses out of the things of God.
I want to be in the middle of what's happening.
I don't want to be one of those saying, "What happened?"

So, how do we develop our awareness of the presence of God? First, by understanding there are several aspects to the presence of God:

The omnipresence of God means that He is everywhere at the same time. Psalm 139:7-8 says:

*Where can I go from Your Spirit? Where can I flee from Your presence?
If I go up to the heavens, You are there; if I make my bed in the depths, You are there.*

There's the Inner Presence of God. When we repent and are born again, the Holy Spirit comes to live in us. 1 Corinthians 6:19 says:

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?

Then there's the Manifest Presence of God. Manifest means revealed, evident, obvious, clearly visible, plain, to be aware of.

I remember when I worked for Family Christian Stores. We had a new president and I had not met him before our manager's conference. When I got there, I saw one new guy who I didn't know and he was kind of bossing people around. I was asking other people, "Who's that bossy guy and who does he think he is?"

Before I had a chance to say anything really stupid, he started telling all the VP's what to do. And they were doing it. It then hit me that he was the new president. It became obvious who he was by the things he said and did. His presence was manifest.

The same thing happens with God.

His omnipresence is always all around us – but there are times where we are really aware of Him. So, to begin to recognize God’s presence, we must first develop our awareness of the omnipresence of God. Psalm 19:1 says:

The heavens declare the glory of God. The skies display His craftsmanship.

Become aware of His presence in His creation - a sunrise or sunset, stars, mountains, rivers. Become aware of God in creation and begin to praise Him for it.

Then become aware of His abiding presence within us. Develop an awareness that you are the temple of the Holy Spirit. Become aware of His still small voice.

Then, in corporate worship, when we all worship together, begin to develop an awareness of God’s presence. In Matthew 18:20, Jesus said:

For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.

God manifests or reveals Himself in corporate worship in a different way than in personal devotions. How does God manifest His presence? By what He says and does. By His Word, His Spirit, and the gifts of the Spirit. 1 Corinthians 14:23-25 says:

So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and some who do not understand or some unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind? But if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in while everybody is prophesying, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, "God is really among you!"

When the God shows us, even unbelievers can know it. How did He show up in this passage? Through the gifts of the spirit – prophecy and words of knowledge. That’s one of the main ways God manifests His presence.

We believe that when we worship, God manifests His presence through what the Holy Spirit says and does in our midst. Sometimes the Bible refers to the manifest presence of God as His glory. There are different words in the original Hebrew for God’s glory.

When glory appears as a verb in the Bible – it means to boast in God. We see this in 2 Corinthians 10:17, which says:

He who glories, let him glory in the Lord.

A more modern way of saying that is found in the New International Version:
Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.

When the word glory appears as a noun in the Bible, it has two meanings. One of the meanings is heaven – the place where God dwells. We see this about Jesus in 1 Timothy 3:16:

God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, and received back into the glory of heaven.

The second meaning of glory is honor, reputation or praise. 2 Chronicles 5:12-14 tells us that when the congregation was united in their praise and thanksgiving:

Then the temple of the Lord was filled with a cloud, and the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the temple of God.

The Hebrews word for glory in this passage kabowd (kaw-bode'); which literally means, weight, splendor, huge quantity, fullness. The word does not mean simply "heavy," but imposing – making a strong impression – impressive - importance.

When the glory of the Lord filled the temple – it was so heavy that the priests literally could not stand in His presence. We've seen that when people fall under the power of God – many times it's just the weight of His glory that does not allow them to stand.

Another word for the glory of God is shekinah, which is the outshining of God's character. He reveals who He is. We see this concept in Exodus 33:15-19 –

Then Moses said to Him, "If Your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. And the Lord said to Moses, "I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name." Then Moses said, "Now show me Your glory." And the Lord said, "I will cause all My goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim My name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion."

Notice that when God shows up, He reveals an aspect of His character and He speaks. But that was in response to Moses asking. My challenge to you is to begin to ask God for His presence to go with you and ask God to show you His glory. You have not because you ask not.

I don't want to go anywhere without the presence of God. Let's be a people dependent upon the presence of God. Let's cry out and contend for the manifest glory and presence of God. This aspect of God's glory is when heaven invades earth.

The vision of GFC is Touching Heaven, Changing Earth.

We desire to spend time in the manifest presence of God, be changed by the power of Spirit, then go out to change our world with the message of Christ. But the key is spending time in the glorious, manifest presence of God.

We are celebrating thanksgiving this week, so I want to give you a big key to entering the presence of God. Psalm 100:4 says:

Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise; give thanks to Him and praise His name.

Thanksgiving is the entryway to God's glory! Thanksgiving gets us in the door. Then, praise gets us into His presence.

Ps 22:3 says that God inhabits the praises of His people. It means, to dwell, to remain; to abide – in other words, God lives in our praise. That's where His presence is manifest. It is only when we approach God with thanksgiving and praise that he manifests, or reveals Himself to us.

Thanksgiving and praise usher in the presence of God. Once God reveals Himself, then worship is our response to His presence. If His presence is not here, there is no worship. If we do not respond to His presence in an appropriate biblical way, there is no worship. Having a thankful heart and expressing that thanks to God gets us into a realm of His presence that we otherwise would not enter.

A biblical key to thanksgiving is found in 1 Chronicles 16:34 –

Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; His love endures forever.

The Bible is telling us that we will never be thankful until we see that God is good and no matter how circumstances may change – God never changes! So, we must constantly remind ourselves of what God has done for us! Why? Because we tend to forget the goodness of God which we have experienced. That's why David said to himself in Psalm 103:1-2:

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits.

Here's why human beings do not want to glorify God with thanksgiving: they want the glory and the credit for what they have in life rather than giving the glory to God who is the giver of all good things! Giving God glory detracts from their own glory, and all people by nature love their own glory more than the glory of God.

You see – there are two types of people in the world: those who love to glorify God and those who love to glorify themselves! At the root of all ingratitude is the love of one's own greatness. Genuine gratitude admits that we are beneficiaries of an unearned gift; everything we receive is because of the grace of God!

The natural man hates to think of himself in terms of neediness and insufficiency and inability. That robs him of all his glory because it gives it all to God.

One of the biggest problems we have is getting our focus off ourselves! Our problems – our worries – our fears – our whatever. Self-centered people do not worship because worship requires dying to self.

The only antidote to this arrogance is to acknowledge that we are sinners who cannot save ourselves – but God is our Savior! We can do nothing of ourselves – but we can do all things through Christ! That is the attitude that glorifies God.

So, I'm here to testify this morning that God is good all the time!
 He was good when you were born and He'll be good the day you die.
 He was good when you got your job and He was good when you lost it.
 He was good when He told you 'yes' and He was good when He said 'no.'
 He was good when He said 'now' and He was good when He said 'wait.'
 Oh give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good!

Listen, there is life and death in the power of the tongue. There is power in our words – especially words of thanksgiving! And complaining is to Satan what praise is to God. Grumbling is to Satan what gratitude is to God.

I'm closing today by encouraging you to speak words that glorify God!
 You see - The optimist says, the cup is half full.
 The pessimist says, the cup is half empty.
 But the child of God says, My cup runs over.

The complainer says, "This is the day the devil has made, let us complain and be miserable in it." The grateful person says, "This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it!"

Ungratefulness says – "What I have is never enough."
 Gratefulness says – "I've learned in whatever state I'm in to be content!"

Fear says, "I don't know how I'm going to pay these bills."
 Faith says, "My God will supply all my needs according to His riches in glory."

Grumbling says, "This is way too hard for me."
 Gratitude says, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

Fear says, "The devil keeps holding me back and beating me down."
 Faith says, "Greater is He that is in me than he that is in the world!"

Grumbling says, "I don't think I'll ever get ahead."
 Gratitude says, "Thanks be to God who always causes me to triumph in Christ Jesus!"

Grumbling says, "Everybody's against me."
Gratitude says, "If God is for me, who can be against me?"

I don't know about you – but God has been so good to me – I am so thankful –
and that makes me want to shout with joy, serve with gladness, sing with
thanksgiving and dance with delight!

Can you thank God this morning!!!
Give thanks for all He's done for you!
Give thanks for answered prayer!
Give thanks that He never leaves you or forsakes you!