

**Turning a Visitation into a Habitation**  
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Today is the last sermon in our series Transitions for Growth. Next week we will begin our verse-by-verse sermon series on the book of James called Wisdom for Everyday Life.

My sermon today is called Turning a Visitation into a Habitation. My text is found in Ephesians 2:19-22 which says:

*You are citizens along with all of God's holy people. You are members of God's family. Together, we are His house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus Himself. We are carefully joined together in Him, becoming a holy temple for the Lord. Through Him you Gentiles are also being made part of this dwelling where God lives by His Spirit.*

The King James Version says: *Ye also are builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit.* The root Greek word for “habitation” means “permanent residence.”

The purpose of God from the beginning of time was to dwell among us. In Genesis 3 we find that God walked and talked with Adam and Eve in the garden in the cool of the day. And all the way at the end of the Bible, Revelation 21:3 says:

*I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.”*

God’s plan all along was not just a visitation, but a habitation. A visitation is something temporary. It speaks of event and seasons where God is pouring out His Spirit. Visitations are not bad! They are awesome times with God.

In fact, VISITATIONS COME BEFORE HABITATION! Think about it – before you move to a place, you first visit that place. You want to visit in order to see if that is a place you want to live. Likewise, God visits a church before He inhabits it.

Yes, His omnipresence is always here. But, we’ve experienced times when God’s manifest presence and glory show up. We’ve experienced outpourings of His Spirit, but then those times recede. That’s always bothered me until I came to this revelation that visitation precedes habitation. God wants to take us beyond the place of temporary visits. He wants to stay and live among us. I believe that where God finds a habitation for His presence, there will be a continual outpouring of His presence. But before God has a place of habitation with us, we need to understand that He usually begins by visiting us at special times.

But we must not be satisfied with an occasional visitation from God. A visitation is meant to give us the hunger for a habitation – a place where He dwells.

I know God indwells every believer. When you receive Christ as your Savior, the Holy Spirit of God comes to live in you. 1 Corinthians 6:19 says:

*Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?*

Individually, we are temples of the Holy Spirit. But He is also building us together into a holy temple where He can live. This is not just for church! This is about living our lives in the presence and power of God at home, at church, and even at work.

Nicolas Herman lived in a French monastery in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. On the surface he was nothing special - he was just the guy in the kitchen who prepared the meals for the others. However, there was something about him that was so profound that other individuals were drawn to him for spiritual guidance.

What was profound about Nicolas Herman was that for 40 years, he lived in the uninterrupted awareness of the presence of God. For him there was no distinction between a time of work and a time of worship. He saw God in all things, and felt God's presence whether he was working in his kitchen or worshipping in his church.

The world has long forgotten the names of the 100 or so clergymen who Nicolas Herman served. But history has never forgotten that humble kitchen worker who is known by the other name he chose for himself: Brother Lawrence. After his death 15 of his letters were gathered and published. That classic book sums up his life in its title: "The Practice of the Presence of God."

You see, there is the indwelling presence of God we have as Christians. But there is also the manifest presence of God that occurs when we are built together as a temple of God. That's why Jesus said in Matthew 18:20

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

Evidently, there is something different, something more, about the way He shows up with us together than when we are alone.

So how does God manifest His presence? By what He says and does. By His Word, His Spirit, signs and wonders, and the gifts of the Spirit.

I believe He shows up to the level of our expectation. And I believe that the manifest presence of God shows us in our services in direct proportion to how we live in His presence in our daily lives!

We want to be a church where the presence and power of God dwell, not where they just occasionally show up. And I believe God is looking for that place – those people. 2 Chronicles 16:9 says:

*For the eyes of the Lord search the whole earth to show Himself strong for those whose hearts are completely His.*

I want God's eyes to see us and I want Him to show up strong here. I did a study on what God inhabits and I found several verses that talk about what God inhabits.

### **1- God dwells with the humble**

Isaiah 57:15 says:

*For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, but also with him who has a contrite and humble spirit."*

This verse shows us 2 important theological truths: God's transcendence and God's immanence.

The transcendence of God is the truth that He is far beyond us.

We dwell in time – He inhabits eternity.

We dwell on earth – He inhabits the heavens and the earth.

We dwell in mortality – He inhabits immortality.

We live with imperfections – He lives in total perfection.

We live in a fallen world of sin – He inhabits holiness.

Do you get the point? God is way above us and way beyond us. But – thank God for the other truth of Isaiah 57:15

*I dwell in the high and holy place, but also with him who has a contrite and humble spirit.*

Yes, God is beyond us, but He chooses to come near us and He chooses to live within those who receive Him as their Lord and Savior. He chooses to indwell those who humble themselves and place no faith in themselves, but all their faith in Him and the new and living way opened to His presence by the blood of Jesus.

So, if we want to be a habitation for God's presence, we need to remain humble. As soon as pride comes in, God goes out. James 4:6 says:

*God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.*

Let me give you a hint: if God resists you, you will lose.

He is stronger than you, faster than you, smarter than you, has more endurance than you and I guarantee you that if God resists you, you will get beat every single time. So, you might as well humble yourself now. God dwells in humility and He pours out grace to the humble.

## **2- God dwells with the repentant**

Revelation 3:20 says:

*Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.*

We all know that God knocks on our heart's door seeking fellowship. But some see it as just a meek and mild little tap and a "If you don't mind, would you please open up and let me in, pretty please." That's because of our misconception about the love of God being non-confrontational. Many are not even aware of the verse right before that, Revelation 3:19 where Jesus says:

*As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.*

The context of this verse is not a mild tapping on the door and a gentle "Please won't you let me in." Thayer's Greek Lexicon says it means "to knock with a heavy blow."

The context of the verse is actually one of rebuke and discipline. It is about the voice of God confronting us and calling us to repentance. I know this is not popular teaching these days. We don't hear a lot about the rebuke of God, the chastening of God, the discipline of God. But Jesus said as many as I love – I rebuke and chasten.

God dwells in the place of humility and the place of repentance. He dwells with those who respond to His voice and His loving discipline. Also,

## **3- God dwells in prayer**

Deuteronomy 4:7 says:

*What other nation is so great as to have their God near them the way the Lord our God is near to us whenever we pray to Him.*

Nothing will draw our heart to God like prayer. And nothing will invite the presence of God like a congregation who is committed to praying, and nothing will make a habitation for God like prayer.

## **4- God dwells in praise**

Psalm 22:3 says: *But thou art holy, O thou that inhabits the praises of Israel.*

That's why praise and worship are such an important part of our church. We don't just sing songs to be singing songs. We don't just praise because it's popular. We really believe God inhabits praise. We really believe Psalm 100:4

*Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise.*

We really believe John 4:23

*The true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.*

God is the seeker we are most concerned about. And what is He seeking? Worshipers who worship Him in spirit and truth. When He finds it, He shows up there. God dwells in a community of believers who realize they are the temple of God and who live like it. 1 Peter 2:5 says:

*You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*

What are the spiritual sacrifices we offer? 1 Peter 2:9 tells us:

*But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.*

One of the ways we offer sacrifices to God is by proclaiming His praise. There is power when we do it as individuals, but there is multiplied power when a group of people unite to show forth the praises of Him who called us out of darkness. That's because:

## **5- God dwells in unity**

Habitation happens when all of us are committed to Him and each other. We are more than just a collection of individual Christians who happen to gather for worship at the same time on the same day. We are a community. We are a family. We are the body of Christ. And God manifests His glorious presence where there is unity!

It happened when Solomon dedicated the temple and the glory fell. It happened on the Day of Pentecost and the Holy Spirit was poured out. And it will happen when we live in unity with one another. Psalm 133 says:

*How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! Unity is as precious as the anointing oil that was poured over Aaron's head...Unity is as refreshing as the dew from Mount Hermon that falls on Mount Zion. There the Lord has pronounced His blessing, even life everlasting.*

Unity is the place of anointing, blessing and refreshing. And notice how the refreshing is connected to Mt. Zion. I'll talk more about that in a minute, but Acts 3:19 says that *...times of refreshing come from the presence of the Lord.*

I want to close with this. Before David became king – the king of Israel was a man named Saul. Saul did not have a heart after God and he did not care about being in God's presence. So, God replaced Saul with David, a man after God's own heart who hungered for the presence of God. And when David became King – the first thing he did is found in 1 Chron. 13:3 where he said:

*Let us bring the ark of our God back to us, for we did not inquire of it during the reign of Saul.*

In those days, the ark of the covenant was the habitation of God. Saul reigned for 40 years and ignored the presence of God. When David became king, 1 of the first things he did was seek the presence of God.

Saul had occasional visitations from God, but David wanted a habitation of God where he could live his life in the presence of God. So – when he brought the ark of God back to Jerusalem – he placed it in a tent on Mount Zion called the Tabernacle of David where praise and worship went on non-stop 24/7 for 40 years! Talk about a habitation!

But David did not go about it God's way at first. That resulted in disaster, so David stopped what he was doing to seek God. 2 Samuel 6:10-12 says:

*He was not willing to take the ark of the Lord to be with him in the City of David. Instead, he took it aside to the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite. The ark of the Lord remained in the house of Obed-Edom for three months, and the Lord blessed him and his entire household.*

*Now King David was told, "The Lord has blessed the household of Obed-Edom and everything he has, because of the ark of God." So David went down and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-Edom to the City of David with rejoicing.*

While David was seeking God about how to bring in His presence, he left the ark at the house of Obed Edom and the Bible says God blessed Obed Edom and his entire household as they hosted His presence.

Now use your sanctified imagination and imagine this scene with me: Obed Edom is standing in his yard with his family watching a parade. He sees the musicians and the ark and the king and everybody's singing and dancing with all their might. They pass his house and the Edoms go back inside talking about all they'd seen and suddenly there's a knock at the door. So, Obed Edom goes to the door and there stands King David. Obed Edom falls at his feet, but David lifts him up and says, "I've got a favor to ask." Obed Edom says, "Sure – anything for my king."

David says, “I want to leave the ark of the covenant in your house while I find out how to bring the presence of God to Jerusalem.” So Obed Edom says, “Please hold on a minute king. This is over my pay grade. Honey.... come here. Kings David’s got a favor to ask us.”

So, Mrs. Edom comes to the door and King David asks, “Can I leave the presence of God here?” So she says “You know, I’ve been wanting to rearrange the front room anyway. We’ll move things around and make room for the ark.”

So – very carefully – they move the ark where the presence of God dwelt into the home of Obed Edom. That family got to do for a short time in the Old Testament what we can do in our lives and homes every day now: host the presence of God! The Bible says God blessed Obed-Edom and his entire household.

- His relationship with his wife had never been better
- His kids were all healthy – they were getting along – doing their chores without being told – getting straight A’s in school
- His crops were bumper crops
- His cows gave more milk and his sheep gave more wool
- All his bills were paid and he had money in savings

Everything was going great – until that fateful day when one of the kids came running in saying “Come outside – I hear something!”

So, Obed Edom went outside and heard some music in the distance. He strained to listen and then he saw coming over the hill King David dancing with all his might, followed by a procession of singers and musicians praising God with all their might. A sick feeling is in the pit of Obed Edom’s stomach as the procession stops right in front of his house and the king says – “We’ve come for the presence of God.” The King thanked him – and then they break out into singing and dancing as they take the presence of God to Jerusalem.

And Obed Edom just stood there watching with his whole family. Then he said – “What do we do now?” I’ll tell you what he did. 1 Chronicles 15 lists all those who ministered in the presence of God in the Tabernacle of David. Verse 24 says *Obed-Edom and Jehiah were also doorkeepers for the ark.*

Here’s what I think happened - When the presence of God left his house – Obed Edom turned to his family and said, “Pack it up. We’re moving with God. Wherever He goes, we go. If God’s here – we’re here. If God’s in Jerusalem – we’re in Jerusalem.” Why? I’d rather be a doorkeeper in the house of the Lord than dwell here. Better is one day spent with God than a thousand spent here. I’d rather spend my life ushering people into the presence of God than anything else on earth. I’ve had a taste of the presence of God and I’ll never be without it again! I’m not satisfied with having had a visitation from God in the past! I will do whatever it takes to have a habitation with God.”

You see, once you’ve experienced God’s presence – nothing else will do!

Singing songs is not enough!  
Praising is not enough!  
Hearing good preaching is not enough!  
Being in the presence of God's people is not enough!  
Only God's presence will ultimately satisfy!  
In His presence is peace and rest!  
In His presence is power and glory!  
In His presence is fullness of joy!  
So, let's move from a place God visits to becoming a habitation for His presence!