

Experiencing God 2

by Anton Bosch

The sermon emphasizes that true encounters with God lead to brokenness and transformation, rather than mere emotional highs.

Scripture: Exodus 3:6, Job 42:5, Isaiah 6:5, Acts 9:4, Revelation 1:17

Topics: "True Repentance", "Spiritual Transformation"

Description

Anton Bosch challenges the common notion of 'experiencing God' as being man-centered, emphasizing that true encounters with God in the Bible left individuals broken, humbled, and with a deep sense of their sinfulness and unworthiness. He contrasts these genuine experiences with modern descriptions of feeling wonderful, uplifting, or thrilling, highlighting the need for a real transformation when encountering God. Bosch stresses that authentic meetings with God result in lasting, fundamental changes in speech, goals, lifestyle, and attitudes, unlike shallow emotional encounters that lack true substance.

Transcript

One of the many problems with the notion of "experiencing God" is that it is man-centered. In other words, God is there for our pleasure, so we can have goose-bumps and liver-shivers. This presupposes that the purpose for a relationship with God is that He may bless us by, amongst other things, giving us pleasurable feelings. So, according to this philosophy we know that we have been in God's presence because we had a warm, fuzzy experience and some wonderful feelings. Most of these experiences are spoken of in extremely positive terms and are described as wonderful, uplifting, calming, exciting, thrilling or moving. Once-again these ideas are contrary to all teaching in the Bible. This is because we have built up a whole tradition of what it is to experience God, which has no touch with reality or God's Word.

It may be helpful to examine the "experiences" of a few men who did "meet" with God as recorded in the Scriptures. The first man who met with God, apart from Adam who hid himself, was Moses. "And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God" (Exodus 3:6) At the end of his meeting with God, this well educated and eloquent man said: "O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue" (Exodus 4:10). Jacob met with God and was left a broken man (Gen 32:31).

Job had a conversation with God and his response to was: "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes: (Job 42:5). Later Isaiah had a vision of God and he cried: "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips..." (Isaiah 6:5). The angel of the Lord appeared to Samson's parents and they said:

"We shall surely die, because we have seen God" (Judges 13:22). Daniel tells of his vision of God: "when I saw this great vision... no strength remained in me; for my vigor was turned to frailty in me, and I retained no strength" (Daniel 10:8). Habakkuk heard God speak and said: "O Lord, I have heard your speech and was afraid... my body trembled; My lips quivered at the voice; Rottenness entered my bones; And I trembled in myself" (Habakkuk 3:2,16).

In the New Testament the first man to "see" the glorified Lord was Saul who was struck to the ground and was blinded by the meeting (Acts 9:4,8). Three of the disciples heard God's "voice" on the mount of transfiguration and "And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid" (Matthew 17:6). John, who lay on the Lord's bosom saw a vision of the ascended Lord said: "And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead" (Revelation 1:17).

There is not a single account in the whole of Scripture of anyone who had an encounter with God and spoke of the experience as being, cool, wonderful, uplifting, exciting or thrilling. Every one of them spoke of terror and the awesomeness of a living God. None were left with warm fuzzy feelings, goose bumps, chills or a wonderful peace. Every person who ever had a real meeting with the real God was left broken, humbled, quaking and with a deep sense of their sinfulness and unworthiness. There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that if your experience with God left you thrilled and excited that you experienced something other than God.

Here is another test. If the person comes away from the "experience" and they cannot stop speaking of how wonderful it was and what they felt and what they experienced, they have most certainly not met with God. Those who truly touched the hem of His garment do not come away speaking of the wonderful feelings and how exciting it was. If, and when, they do talk it will be about the goodness, kindness and grace of a glorious God who drew near to a pitiful sinner. Every man who met with God in the Bible was left with a deep awareness of God's glory and holiness and of their own unworthiness.

As for those who boast, write books and grant interviews about their experience with God have most certainly not met with God. The closer we get to Him, the more broken and humbled it will leave us. It just cannot be any other way. How can a sinful, albeit redeemed man see, hear or be touched by the King of the Universe and be left with anything but self-loathing and adoration for such a gracious and merciful God?

Indeed any meeting with God has to leave us radically and permanently changed. Moses' face shone, Paul was no longer the ambitious, self-righteous hater of the believers but became one whose very life was poured out as a sacrifice for the church he persecuted. Quiet frankly, I am sick of people who claim to have had some experience with God and who continue in their lying, deceitful, destructive and self-centered ways. Any true meeting with God has to result in real and fundamental changes. These changes are enduring and not a shallow veneer of holiness and piety. Neither are they the feeble results at self-reform. Every one of the men mentioned above was never the same after their encounters. Their speech, goals, lifestyle and attitudes were all dramatically changed - often in a way that was beyond human comprehension. Those who "experience God" during Sunday morning worship or a 5 minute stint at the altar, complete with a couple of tears and who emerge simply to continue with their gossip around the Sunday lunch table can indeed claim to have "been there, done that, bought the T shirt" but they cannot claim to have met with God.

These pseudo experiences are right from the pit of hell for one simple reason: They are a placebo that prevents millions of sincere souls from hungering and thirsting for the real thing.

Yes, God still touches frail humans. Yes, He still speaks and still reveals Himself, but the true revelation of God is infinitely more than a circus act, or a ride on an emotional roller-coaster, or a variety show. A confrontation with God is truly transformative.

"But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2Cor 3:18)

- To be continued.

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