

(Hebrews - Part 24): Presence-Manifest Presence

by A.W. Tozer

A.W. Tozer's sermon explores the profound difference between God's omnipresence and His manifest presence, emphasizing the necessity of redemption and the church's role in experiencing this divine closeness.

Duration: 30:54

Scripture: Hebrews 9:1-14

Topics: "Expositional"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of light in a dark world. He shares a personal story of being in complete darkness and relying on a small glowing stick to find his way. The speaker then discusses the basic truths that all other truths rest upon, including the fact that God created humanity to know and enjoy Him. However, due to humanity's rebellion, they have become alienated from God. The sermon concludes with the reminder that God sent His Son to the cross to save humanity from the darkness of hell and offer them everlasting life.

Transcript

Please turn to the 9th chapter of Hebrews. Hebrews, the 9th chapter, and I think that I'll ask you to read it with me, down to verse 14. I'll read the 1st verse, you the 2nd, so unresponsibly, to and including the 14th verse of Hebrews 9. Then verily the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service and a worldly sanctuary.

And after the 2nd veil, the tabernacle which is called the holiest of all. And over it the chariot beams of glory shadowing the mercy seat, of which we cannot now speak particularly. But into the 2nd went the high priest alone, once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the errors of the people.

Which was a figure for the time then present, in which there were offered both gifts and sacrifices that could not make him that did the service perfect as pertaining to the conscience. But Christ, being come and high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, nor of this building. For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifyeth to the purifying of the flesh.

Let's have a moment of prayer. Now, Father, we thank thee for these eternal words, eternal salvation, eternal sacrifices. We thank thee that thou hast in mind not tomorrow or the next day or the next century, but all the eternities to come.

Pray thy blessing now to be upon us while we hear the word and attempt to speak it. We are unworthy of both or either. We are unworthy to speak and we are unworthy to hear, but if we can't be worthy, O Lord, at least help us in a worthy manner to speak and to hear.

For Christ's sake. Amen. There are certain basic truths which all other truths rest upon.

And if we don't get and hold those certain basic truths, then we can't know the others, and we can't know the others unless and only by constant reference to these basic truths. And one of them I'm developing Sunday night, that God made us for himself. He made us that we might know him and that we might live with him, and that we might enjoy him.

But the race has been guilty of revolt. Men have broken with God, and the Bible says we are alienated from him. These were strangers to him, the human race.

And they have ceased to love him and ceased to trust him and ceased to enjoy his presence. Now I'd like to, and I suppose this will come up later on as I go through the book, but I'd like to press home this truth that God is everywhere. The presence of God is everywhere.

David said, Whither shall I go from thy spirit, or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there, and if I make my bed in hell, thou art there. And if I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there will thy hand lead me and hold me. So there is no getting out of the presence of God, that's an impossibility.

But the manifest conscious presence of God is something else. And it's the manifest conscious presence of God that we are to enjoy. It isn't enough to live by faith.

If by faith we mean naked faith without any manifestation on God's part. David was not hesitant to pray that the Lord would show him a token for good. I do not believe that it's any proof of spirituality whatsoever, nor that it's any magnification of the doctrine of faith, when we bat everybody down and shut them up and insist that they are to hang upside down like hibernating bats, and be cold and quiet and asleep, without any response from God or any proof that anything is going on.

I believe that since I'm a personality and God is a personality, that we can have personality intercourse, intercourse between one personality and another personality in love and faith and conversation, to speak and be answered. I believe this. And it is, I repeat, no proof that we have great faith, that we are ready solemnly and glumly and grimly and coldly to live our lives saying, I believe, but never having God give any response to our faith.

There ought to be a response. I know that there are times when we walk by faith and not by sight. We never walk by sight, but we walk by faith sometimes, when God, for his own goodness, has hidden his face a moment from us.

But he said, for a small moment I have hid my face from you, but with everlasting kindness will I gather you. So we must have again that presence, we must learn to live again in that presence, and that manifest presence, that conscious presence. The difference between revival and every other state of spiritual state

that your church may know is the difference between the presence of God and the manifest presence of God.

God is with the dead his church in this city, that is, God is present there. Where should I flee from thy presence? Whither shall I go from thy spirit? If I make my bed in hell, thou art there. And the poorest and the worst church in the world, wherever it might be, let's humbly hope it's not this one, wherever it might be, God knows I don't know where it is.

I only know wherever the worst church is, God's presence is there. But the worse the church, the less it manifests. And the better the church, the more it manifests.

You go into some churches and when you sit down you are conscious of a presence. You go into other churches and when you sit down you are conscious of the beauty of the music, the stained glass windows, the sonorous tones of the minister and all the rest, but you are not conscious of the presence of God necessarily. There is such a thing as God manifesting himself, and God wants to manifest himself to his people.

Now how does he do it? Well, he did a work we call redemption. It is the work to effect reconciliation. You see, the liberal churches, and I find now that I'm going to have to ignore my notes, but the liberal churches are always talking about how nice it is to turn and say hello to our Heavenly Father and to realize that this is our Father's world and that all the stars sing about him and the little buttercups talk about him.

It's all very wonderful, but the simple fact is man and God are enemies, until there has been reconciliation by a sacrifice which God has satisfied with. The difference between Cain and Abel wasn't that Cain was a bad man and Abel a good man, they were both bad men. The difference between Cain and Abel was that Abel knew he was bad and Cain didn't know it.

So Abel brought a sacrifice as much as to say, O God, I should die like this lamb. And Cain came saying hello to the All-Father any sacrifice. He would have made a wonderful prayer Sunday morning while he intoned through his blessed nose a prayer without blood and without sacrifice and without the cross and without the lamb, because he brought the flowers and the fruit and said, I like you, God, here is a present.

And God turned his back on him, but Abel came and in humility brought the lamb and bled it there on the altar and looked up and said, O God, I'm not worthy. And God smiled and sent fire to the altar and witnessed that he pleased God. Witnessed that he pleased God not because he was a good man, for he wasn't, but because he took the bad man's place in the presence of a holy God.

Cain displeased God not because he was a worse man than Abel, they were both sinners, born of the same fallen parents, but because he assumed he was all right when he was wrong. He assumed there was nothing between him and God and Abel knew there was. There is the difference.

So the Lord sends by redemption, he affects this reconciliation, and he brings us into right relation to him in order that he might bring us into conscious relation, that we might be conscious of each other, God of us and we of God. And he wants to perfect this experience of the oneness of man and God. The Old Testament tells us how this is and gives us a shining picture of God's plan.

That is what we read in the 9th chapter of Hebrews, that tabernacle, or tent as it is called in some translations, for it was a very flimsy affair made out of hides and the walls of wood and was portable, could be knocked down and carried. The tabernacle, I don't believe much in charts, I think more or less charts

are for children, but if you could get at least an idea in your mind, and picture this in your mind, it would help you. And if you get it in your mind, it will be in your mind long after the chart has been put back on the shelf.

But here was this tabernacle in the wilderness. It was an oblong affair, wooden walls made of acacia and a roof over it, part of it, of skins. And it was divided up, first of all outside of this, out in the Gentile world, let's think of these people.

The thrones outside the walls. They were the busy rank and file of revolted men. They were the Torontonians and the Chicagoans and the New Yorkers and the Londoners and the rest of them all over the world.

They are those outside the walls, outside. They were without hope and without God in the world, is what Paul says about them, terrible, terrible Paul. Would he get chased out of town if he came here and began to tell the sinners in Toronto that they had no God, they were without hope and without God in the world, and that the spirit of disobedience worked in them? They'd run him out.

They did many places, and I suppose they wouldn't here, and I don't know any place where they wouldn't. But we don't want to hear this. We want to hear how nice it is to know God, but we don't want to know that until we're converted through Jesus Christ, we're outside the walls, we're Gentiles without hope, sinners without hope outside the walls.

These people, sinful people, they get and they spend, they marry and they give in marriage, they build and they plant, they sow and they harvest and they tear down and build up and beget others like themselves and die. That's humanity, that's the way it is. But they're not concerned very much about God, very rarely think of God, except when they're making political speeches or when it's convenient to use God.

Then there's the lower court, that's the court of the Gentiles. That was not inside the great box-like structure properly, it was outside, and it was called the court of the Gentiles. That's people interested in religion.

A lot of people are interested in religion, you know. They're interested, but they're far from God nevertheless. Maybe they're practicing religion, maybe they're practicing heathen rites of various kinds.

Maybe they're telling their beads with unconsciously moving lips on the bus or airplane. Maybe they're paying respect to religion. When the baby is born or when somebody is married or when somebody dies, weddings, christenings and funerals, they manage to get to church.

You know, there's a rather cynical expression that some people go to church three times in their lives. The first time they throw water on them, the second time they throw rice on them, and the third time they throw dirt on them. And this seems to be about as far as it goes with some people.

They make it to church three times. These are the Gentiles outside, but they're religious Gentiles. They pay token respect to religion, but they're giving no regard to God's way or God's cross or God's redemption.

Then there's the inner court. Here in the inner court there were two affairs. One was an altar and one was a laver.

It was a great brazen altar. It wasn't a pretty thing at all. It was a kind of topless furnace with a grate underneath where you could put a fire, and then you could put beasts there.

You could put a beast on that altar and put your fire under there and stir it up hot, and the beast would go up in an ugly smoke. That was the altar, and there the lambs were offered, and there the beasts, and there the red heifer, and there the creatures that were brought to sacrifice. This isn't pleasant at all.

I don't think that that part of the tabernacle where the altar and the laver were, were pleasant places to be. I don't think a priest's job was a pleasant job. I don't think so.

And these poetic, artistic ministers who insist that religion is such a dovetail, lovely, flowery affair, they call it slaughterhouse religion. They say, We don't believe in slaughterhouse religion. We don't believe that God Almighty was pleased because Aaron and his sons caught a heifer, cut her throat, bled her out in basin, sprinkled things with blood, and then offered her body on that altar.

We don't believe that. We think that it must have been an unpleasant, a terrible thing. Well, there is one place that must have been and must be more unpleasant and more terrible, and that's hell.

The scripture tells us that if a man is not redeemed by the blood of an acceptable sacrifice, he is most certainly going to spend his eternity in hell. And when we nice it up and sugarcoat it and line it up nicely and take away the slaughterhouse element from it, we've taken away the cross. It must not have been a very pleasant thing to see a man die on a cross outside of the hills of Jerusalem.

It must not have been a pleasant thing to see them die there. When our Lord died, the poets have made it so beautiful that we can have the pictures around and send them out on Easter. But it wasn't a beautiful sight at all.

Here was a man stripped naked, hanging in the hot April sun, and here was a man who was bleeding from his hands and feet and side and forehead and down over his face. Here was a man whose beard was plucked in spots by the enemies who had pulled his beard. Here was a man twisted and suffering and writhing in the agony and groaning in the pain of it all.

Here was a cross and a man on a cross. Why was the man on a cross? Because there was one thing worse than that, and that was hell where men were going. And so God sent his only begotten Son that that man might go to the cross and stop the gates of hell and shut them up so those who believed in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

So let's not get too nice about all this. Of course there was a slaughterhouse there, and of course there was a slaughterhill there where a man died. But a man died in terror because sin is a terrible thing, and a man died in pain because sin is a painful thing.

A man died ostracized and forsaken because sin brings ostracism and forsakenness. God turned his back on that hill while that man died there because he will turn his back on every man who doesn't die with him, and every man who does not take advantage of the blood he shed. So there is that altar, and it isn't a very pleasant thing.

Flies were about it, and sticky blood and old, dried blood, and ashes, and the pitiful pieces of what had been a beautiful animal lying about. But there was another piece of furniture there in that inner court, and that was the laver. The laver was filled with water, and everything could be washed there.

As you entered and moved in, you first came to the altar, and there the lamb died. Then when you passed the altar you came to a great bowl, if I might respectfully suggest it looked like a huge punchbowl, standing up there and filled, and they washed there. As though God were saying, you first have to come by the cross and by the blood, by the altar and by the laver, by the lamb that died and by the washing of water by the word.

So they came and moved on in. That was the inner court. After that there was another.

This was shut off by a veil, a huge veil shut this one out. Nobody could go in there except the priests. Worshippers could come in where the altar and the laver were.

After they had come by the cross and by the cleansing, then they would come into the holy place. Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Except he repents, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

That holy place, this was the privilege they now enjoyed. And there were three pieces of furniture in that holy place. One was the little tablecloth, and the other was the lights, the candlesticks, seven of them burning there.

The other was the little table with bread on it, and the other was an altar of incense. Now, it's not difficult to know what all this means. I think the Church Universal agrees that that light was the light of the Holy Ghost, the light that lights every man that comes into the world.

He, our Lord, said, I am the light of the world, and when you have come by the cross and been cleansed in your enlightenment, says God the Holy Ghost, in giving us this little object lesson, he says you can be enlightened. The light of the world is Jesus, and the light of the Holy Ghost shining there, the sevenfold spirit shining, made it light. But there was bread there too, it was called shewbread, or the bread of the presence.

Wonderful, I think, the bread of the presence. He was there and he was feeding his people, unseen, but feeding his people the bread of the presence. Jesus said, I am the light of the world.

So you'll come by that cross and by that cleansing, and then you are fed the light of the world. The 6th chapter of John tells all about that. They said, Give us bread, and they first said, Our fathers ate bread, yes, but the bread your fathers ate was only a temporary bread.

But I have come that you might have bread, and if you eat of it you shall never die. And they said, Give us that bread, and he said, I am the bread of life. Then many turned and went away, they couldn't take that, it was too doctrinal, too strong.

If there had been a preacher preaching like that, they would have said, Well, we love our brother, but let's get rid of him. We think that that's too strong to say that Jesus is bread, that I eat of him. But that's what it says here, nevertheless.

It says that in figure and type in the Old Testament, it says it in blunt language in the New Testament. And the Church has agreed to it at least nominally down the centuries, for we have our communion service, and we eat of the showbread while the light of the Holy Ghost shines around about us. And then there is the altar of incense.

What was that? Sweet-smelling incense was laid on that altar and burned, and that little room was filled with the sweet-smelling incense. That was prayer. Isn't that a beautiful picture? This is what this Church ought to be.

It ought to be a place that is lighted by the light of the world, shed forth by the sevenfold Holy Spirit. And where we gather at intervals to eat of the bread of life, not only on Communion Sunday, that points it up, but all the time, every Sunday. And then where the altar of incense sends up its sweet spirals of fragrant perfume, sweet to God and pleasant in his nostril, and the sound of prayer pleasant in his ear, and the sight of an enlightened people gathered together pleasant to his eyes, this is a Church, brother and sister.

And that's the only kind of Church I'm interested in. I am not interested when you have to go out and bring somebody in from the outside and say, Will you come and perform for us? Can you imagine a priest bringing a clown and saying to the clown, Now come, clown, into the holy place. Be reverent now, and do it for Jesus' sake, but come, clown, into the holy place.

And when that clown came in, here was light, the light that lighted every man, light that never was on land or sea. And here is the bread, reverently we may eat and live forever, here is the altar of incense where we can send up our prayers to the ears of God, and now the clown will do his part. And of course, a big crowd will be there to see the clown.

But I wouldn't. I'd walk five miles to keep from seeing him or hearing him, and I wouldn't walk one inch to see him, and I wouldn't give one dime to support him. What do I mean by that? I mean all of this extra-scriptural, unholy crap that's been dragged into the Church in recent times.

We have grieved the Holy Ghost and muted the lights, and the bread has gotten stale, and the altar of incense has lost its fragrance. But it's all for us, it's for you and me, it's for us here as a Church, it's for this Church, and it's for everyone. The light of the world and the bread of life and the right to ask what I will and have it done for me.

Now, a little further explanation might be that here is the Church and the Kingdom. And the traveler finds light, and the child finds food, and the priest is able to pray. So you are a traveler on your way home, but you have light.

It's terrible traveling at night without any light. I never remember but once in my life making a little trip over a hill in the state of Pennsylvania when there was no light at all. Now, mostly there's a little bit of light, the stars give a little bit of light, and refraction gives a little light from somewhere.

But this time I would deliberately put my hand like this, and I couldn't see my hand moving in front of my face, literally so. I went by instinct, I knew where my home was, and I knew the role of the hills, and so as a young lad I found my way by a sort of instinct back to my home. But it was completely, totally and hopelessly dark.

Just as dark as the inside of a sealed box. Without light, some kind of light, even a little bit of light, the night can be horribly, frightfully dark. And Jesus said the dark night came when no man could work, and the New Testament talks about the moral and spiritual state of the world as being that of a dark night.

We travelers desperately need light. I remember as a boy going out fishing with an old fellow, and suddenly our light went out. But the old man was an old woodsman, he wasn't worried.

It was terribly dark down there in the swamps, we could never have gotten out. But he had a bit of a stick, and on the end of that stick was a little fire, but the fire had gone out. So what he did was to wave it.

As he waved it, it glowed. And he went ahead waving this thing round and round and round, and it gave a nice little circle of light, and we went on our way. I look out and I see these men with their tiny little gel sticks, shaking them around, and this one has a little light here, and this one has a little light there, but the landscape is dark, dark.

He carries his own light, and that's a terrible thing. But the light of the world is Jesus. And the Christians have not their little light, but they have their light of God.

Travelers find the light, and the child finds food, and the priest is able to pray. Now, that's the church. And for that church I will give everything that I have.

And if I knew that that kind of church could be in the world now again, that is, the churches could become that kind of church, I wouldn't hesitate to give the blood out of my veins. I don't boast about it, but I think I could say that, that I would gladly do it, and I know that I have many other thousands of friends who would, too, if we could have the church again, the church again, purified and cleansed. So when we walk in, we know we are walking in where the light shines, where there is bread to eat and where there is prayer to be made which goes to the ear of God with acceptance.

That's the church. I love thy kingdom, Lord, the house of thine abode, the church our dear Redeemer saved with his own precious blood. I love the church, for this is what the church is.

It's a company of people committed to this faith, to this kind of belief. Now, there is yet further penetration, but I am deliberately stopping short of the inner, inner holy of holies, the sanctum sanctorum. I am stopping short of that because I want to talk about that next Sunday.

But we let it rest at that now and point out that the altar is here, the Lamb that once was slain, he didn't stay dead, he rose again, but his sacrifice remains efficacious forever. The cleansing blood is here so you and I can come, come on into that presence. The question is, have we done it? The question is, are we doing it? I hope that it may be so that we have, but if there should be those who haven't, then I point to the cross where he died, to the blood that cleanses, to the Holy Ghost who gives the light, to the living Lamb that gives the bread, and tell you that you have a right to enter and be a priest of the Most High God, as certainly as Melchizedek or Aaron.

That your prayers can rise, cleansed by blood, enlightened by the Holy Ghost, into the very presence of God. How can I enter that very farthest-in presence and habitually live in the presence? I'll tell you next Sunday, because I must close now. In the meantime, I'll be going down to North Carolina and preaching down there to a company of preachers.

They've got a retreat down there. Vance Havner says, preachers ought to advance, not retreat. But I'm going down to that retreat, preaching twice a day, and I'll be back here the latter part of the week.

In the meantime, I'll have in mind you, and I'll have in mind this marvelous secret of entering the presence and living there all the time.

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