

Path

by A.W. Tozer

The cloud of concealment is a barrier to spiritual growth that prevents us from experiencing the fullness of God's presence and power in our lives.

Duration: 43:10

Scripture: Philippians 3:13

Topics: "Seeking God"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of not being controlled by fear and societal expectations. He encourages the audience to rise above the clouds of fear and take control of their lives. The preacher uses the analogy of being in an airplane and how, in just 15 minutes, the clouds can be left behind and the sun can shine again. He urges the listeners to put their trust in God and take action to overcome their challenges.

Transcript

Now, again I'm going to flip into 3rd chapter, I'm only going to read this verse 13 and 14. Brethren, brethren, says the apostle, I count not myself to have apprehended, but this one thing I do. For getting those things which are behind and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press the mark to the prize of the high holiness, God in Christ Jesus.

Now, you do know that he wrote this two years before he died, he just had two years to go. And then at the end of the two years, or between the writing of this and his testimony in 2nd Timothy, something had happened evidently, because the man of God said that here, that he knew who he believed, and that he had fought a good fight, and that he had kept the faith, and that he was now ready to be offered. Now, that something happened in those two years to the man of God.

Now, you have been listening to me over these last weeks, and again we ask, what is the pastor advocating? What is this that he's preaching? Well, I'm concerned that it be nothing else but Christ. Because anything anybody offers you that is not just more of Christ is false. I'm concerned that in doctrinal foundation be the Scriptures, and in its whole spiritual meaning would be apostolic, and that it be in harmony with the best in the historic church, the best in devotional literature, the best in humanity, and the best in biography.

And yet, why does this preaching sound different? Why does it sound strange when compared with much of so-called and true gospel preaching? Well, I want to tell you this before I enter in, really, to the message for tonight. But I want to tell you that about a generation ago, textualism captured the gospel church. By the gospel church, I mean the fundamentalist church, the gospel church, those who believe in Christ the Savior and accept him as such.

And the scribes and the lawyers took over and set up a hierarchy in schools and Bible conferences and churches, and they all went over to it. And the rule became a rigid adherence to words. Now, it so happened that I believe and have never believed anything else in my entire life, but in the plenary, that means full, verbal, inspiration of the scriptures as originally given.

You'll be honest with me, and if you have reason to quote me, quote this, that I believe and have always believed as a responsible Christian teacher and believer in the plenary, verbal inspiration of the scriptures as originally given. But the problem was and still is that the... By school, I don't mean any particular school, I mean a school of thought, had the verbal inspiration, the doctrine of verbal inspiration, rigor mortis set into it. And with the result that we were... The religious imagination was sullied, the religious yearning was choked down, the religious aspirations slapped down, and the longing of fire and wings of the children of God were clipped like a hen in a hen coop.

And we were told, as shut up and like what we had, that this was it. Brethren, do you know what happened to this? The result of this thing, with the language of the New Testament persisting and the spirit of the New Testament grieved, do you know what happened? Well, I'll tell you. There came about a revolt, a revolt against the scribes in two directions.

The masses of evangelicals revolted without knowing they were revolting. They didn't know it. It was the gasping of a fish in a bowl where there's no oxygen.

The masses revolted into religious entertainment until the gospel churches are now camping on the doorsteps of the theater. And then, over against that and on the opposite side, some of the more intelligent fundamentalists and evangelicals revolted into evangelical rationalism, which is already busy making its peace with liberalism. And the result is that you just don't hear what the rest of the time I'm speaking about.

It sounds strange to hear anyone preaching as I preach because on one side we have the masses saying, I've accepted Jesus' great tribute. Let's go and have fun. And on the other side, furious, reverent men fencing their way perilously near to the borders of liberalism.

And the New Testament message, objective and method, has been allowed to lie dumb. And in the name of the Lordship of Jesus, which is Lordship in name only, we have introduced our own message, our own objective, and then have thought out our own method for achieving those objectives which are in many cases not scriptural at all. Now, my brethren, I want to ask you, is it heresy to yearn and pray as long after God? Is it heresy? Does it constitute a radical mind to yearn and pray in spite? Do you remember what I read the first night? The great prayer in the cloud of unknowing.

God, I beseech thee so, for to cleanse the intent of mine heart with the unspeakable gift of thy grace, that I may perfectly, lovely, and worthily praise thee. To long perfectly to love God and worthily to praise him. It'll mean more than words when you say it.

Mean as it costs you everything. Is that heresy? Should they put a man in jail for it? Should he be ostracized for it? In the light of our hymnody? In the light of our devotional book back to Paul? In the light of the biography of the saint? No, I think not. No, I want to read to you just a brief little thing here from a book called the Philokalia.

He starts out, he wants to help us Christians forward to know God. To do what in English proud calls to be one with God, united with God. Now I want you, Bible Christians, to ask yourselves the question, could I go along with this? Now this Mesophorus was a Greek Christian.

That is, he was over on the Greek side. He wasn't a Protestant and he wasn't a Roman Catholic and he wasn't a Martoma and he wasn't a Coptic nor a Mester. He belonged to over on the Greek side, but he was a saint.

And he wrote a little book to help people to go along with God. And he said, you who desire to capture the wondrous divine illumination of our Savior Jesus Christ, you believe in this. And he seeks to feel the divine fire in your hearts.

Now here was a scholar and a saint. And he wrote it into a book in the 16th century, which is a classic and is recognized as such. And he dared to use the word, he seeks to feel the divine fire in your hearts and strives to sense and experience the feeling of reconciliation with God.

Who in order to unearth the treasure buried in the field of your heart and to gain possession of it, have renounced everything worldly. You desire the candles of your soul to burn brightly, even now, not in the future. We have become so dispensationistic minded that we've put everything into the future.

Everything into the future. But this man says, you desire the candles of your soul to burn brightly, even now. Indeed, he said, in this present world.

And who for this purpose have renounced all this world. To which by conscious experience, conscious experience, he thinks he's a modern psychologist, to know and to receive the kingdom of heaven existing within you. He said what? I'm teaching all the time.

That Christ dwells in the heart of every believer. Know ye not that Christ is in you, except you be aware of this. And if a man has not the spirit of Christ, he is none of you.

And the riches of the mind lie potentially there. But we have been forbidden to believe it, or forbidden to say so. And we have been choked down and the oxygen cut off, and our wings slipped and our longing killed.

And that's why when I say it sounds different and strange and people say, what is this new doctrine? It's no new doctrine at all. Now my brothers, I want to talk a little bit tonight about the cloud of concealment. Now Christ has made full atonement for it.

Let's start there. Christ has made full atonement. Christ has forced full atonement made.

What a wonderful Savior. Would you like to hear it said for you by somebody else that could say it better than the theologian? Little Lady Julian, here's what she said. The precious amends for satisfaction our Lord hath made for man's sin, turning all our blame into endless honor.

Could it be said sweeter than that? The precious amends our Lord hath made for man's sin, turning all our blame into endless honor. Paul said it a little differently. He said where grace abounded, sin does what? Where sin abounded, grace does much more bound, turning all our blame into endless honor.

Now God's face is turned toward us. I want you to think like that tonight. Don't let the devil teach you.

Don't let doubt forsake you. Don't let anything I say or anybody that's ever said teach you from this glorious knowledge. But the face of God is turned toward you.

And as a Christian, the smiling face of God is turned toward you. Why then do we not enjoy, now to use these words again, why then do we as Christians do not capture the wondrous divine illumination of the Savior Jesus Christ? Why do we not feel the divine fire in our eyes? Why do we not try to sense and experience, or why do we not sense and experience the feeling of reconciliation with God as well as the knowledge of it? And why do we not gain possession of it? Oh, I know they dismiss it by saying it's your position and your possession. But that can get so cold as dry ice.

Why is it that the candles of our soul do not burn more brightly even now? Why is it that we do not have the conscious experience to know and receive the kingdom existing within us? Well, I'll tell you why. Because there is between us and this smiling face of God a cloud of concealment. Now, my friends, there is never such a thing as a day when the sun doesn't shine.

In some of the cities, I think it's Atlanta, Georgia, maybe I'm wrong, but one of the southern cities offers, the newspaper offers, that they will give all that room, that day's run of the newspaper, free of charge if the sun doesn't shine. Somewhere, is that in Atlanta? St. Petersburg? Well, now let me tell you something. That the sun shines every day.

And there never has been a day from the hour God said, let the sun rule the day, that the sun hasn't shone. But there are dark days and misty days and cloudy days, and days that get so dark you have to light the light, and days that get so dark that in the country the chickens go to roost, I think. Now, there are dark days, and yet the sun is shining just as brightly as on the brightest, clearest days do.

Why then does it not shine on the earth? Because there is between the sun and the earth a cloud of concealment. The sun is all right, the sun is up there gleaming broadly, and just as bright and just as hot and just as radiant as ever. But he doesn't get through to the earth because there is a cloud of concealment.

Now, what is this cloud, my brother? You know what it is from the standpoint of the weather. But what is it as applied to Christians? Why, what's the matter? Well, it's the cloud of concealment. The cloud that we allow to be over us as Christians.

What is this cloud? Atonement has been made. There is nothing to do for it's all been done. Not a drop of blood needs to be shed.

Not a spear needs to enter a holy heart. Not a tear nor a groan nor a drop of sweat. Not a moment in agony.

Death has no more dominion over him. It is done. It is finished.

It is forever done. And the face of God shines down upon us. And even upon Christians there is that cloud, or above Christians there is that cloud of concealment which befits thee and thy God is above his face.

Now, what is that cloud? Well, it's a cloud. It may be one thing. It may be many things.

There is the cloud of pride for Asia. You are your father's child and heaven is your home. And yet for a lifetime you may go without the wondrous divine illumination of the Savior Jesus Christ.

Without feeling the divine fire in your heart. Or sensing or experiencing the feeling of reconciliation with God. And without the candles of your soul burning brighter.

Because you allow a cloud to be over your head. And the devil says, well, God hit you. God turned his back.

The devil lies. The back of God has never been turned to its child of God, which will repent and sinner. Since the hour Jesus roamed and died and said he couldn't.

The face of God is turned all away. But we allow this cloud of pride. And the cloud of stubbornness.

There are some people that are just plain stubborn. They will not bend. They will not kneel.

Neither to man or God. Or to anybody. Except the law and death.

They will not. And so this cloud of stubbornness. God complained about Israel.

He said, your neck is black. And your forehead is high. And you couldn't get them to kneel.

And then there is the cloud of self-will. Now, self-will is a very religious thing. And it may become religious.

And get converted. And enter right with you into the church when you join. And bring you into the chamber when you pray.

That is self-will. And self-will, you'll note, is good-natured only when it's done in the same way. And it's God's will tempered when it's crossed.

Now you think about that. Is your surrender to God sufficient? So that you can be spiritual even when you're crossed. And then there is ambition.

And do you know there's even religious ambition? There are people that are religiously ambitious. For something perhaps that isn't in the will of God. Or that's for self-aggrandizement.

And the result is that it's a cloud above them between them and their God. Now, there's a literal proverb. And in not translation, it reads like this.

It rather amuses me. Because it's so true. And it's such a perfect picture of the human heart.

He says, He says, And you'll find Christians like that. Having what God calls a controversy with me. And then, Everything I came for myself.

Now this is the one thing I've been teaching. I suppose it's hard to grasp. That I've got to give up everything.

That this pastor that I have here must go on the block. And I must be ready at any moment to give it up. And let it ride away on any sermon I teach or any position I take.

I dare not tiptoe it. My job is editor of the weekly. My position in the religious world.

My, my, everything has to be on the block. And ready to go. If I own it, It is a cloud over my head.

And it becomes a cloud of impurity that nothing will penetrate. And people try to pray through it. If you can't pray through it, nothing can penetrate it.

You try to fast through it. People have fasted for days out of nothing but stubbornness. You know that.

The history, I won't go into politics. But over the world in the last 25 years, You remember that there were some who fasted and died for political reasons. Just through downright stubbornness.

And there are those who try to fast their way through. You can't do it, brother. The cloud of concealment.

If it is something that you say is yours, Then you won't give up. You'll think of me, but you don't. It'll put a veil over.

And if there's any sun, it'll not be very bright. It'll be a cloud. You can't pray through it.

It's the idea that if you pray long enough, everything will be all right. That's why God got some people up off their knees and told them to quit. Two different instances the Lord stopped praying to them.

Did you know that? I said, no, you didn't. There was a man, Saul. And he was praying and praying.

God came and put his hand over his mouth and said, Saul, not Saul, Samuel. He said, Samuel, don't pray anymore for Saul. He's broke.

Don't pray for him. Shut him up. And then there was another instance where Joshua was lying face down praying.

We'd have written a text about him. We'd have said, oh, what a thing. But God says, what, he's lying there on your stomach.

I don't honor a man for lying on his belly. Get up off your feet and deal with the situation in your crowd. And then I'll bless you and save all that lying around going.

So remember that it's not an idea that if you pray long enough, everything will be okay. It's not right, but the seed of God loves these long seasons of prayer. And God gives an answer to prayer.

And prayer is the soul's sincere desire and the breath of the saint and all that I believe. And I think practically from me. But the idea that I can hang on to things and then throw the cloud away while I'm hanging on to the cloud.

No, no, you can't do it. And that's the trouble. So nothing will get to it.

And then there is fear. Fear is always a child of unbelief. No matter what you're scared about, whether you've got cancer or whether your child's likely to have polio or whether you're likely to lose your job or whether you're rushing to send a guided missile and destroy Chicago.

Remember always that fear is a child of unbelief. And fear over your head is a cloud of obscurity. And hide that smiling face from you.

It doesn't, it doesn't turn your face away. For the blood of atonement keeps his face forever turned towards his people and towards repentant sinners. And then there is self-love.

Self-love. We make a joke out of this. But we never should make a joke out of it, friends.

Because self-love is a cloud of concealment, a cloud of obscurity. And even the Christian who has offered himself to Christ and has, has believed and has converted. That Christian can keep a cloud of concealment over him simply by loving himself.

And to fall out of love with yourself is an accident. That is, it is not only an accident, I mean a hurt. It hurts you like falling off of something.

And then self-gratulation and self-admiration. These self-things. They're there and as long as they remain there.

And then the odd thing about it is that the scribes have excused me, and proved that they should be there, and you can't do anything about it. And yet we cry within us, Oh, that the candles of my soul might burn brightly even now. Oh, that I might know the divine illumination of my Saviour Jesus Christ.

And we groan with the groan that goes back to Paul in Philippians. It goes back to David in the Psalms. That we might come into a warm, spiritual presence, lasting fellowship with Jesus Christ that lives within us.

And we're, we're raving so high. And yet we can't because we admire ourselves. And we're not going to have anybody disturb us.

And we congratulate ourselves. Or, or we love ourselves. And then there's money.

Money these days gets between, betwixt thee and thy God, as it were, we call it. Gets betwixt thee and thy God. Some evangelist years ago in my hearing pointed out that you can take two dimes and cut out a landscape.

You can take two dimes with you to the Great Smoky Mountain and go clear to the top knob of the Great Smoky And with two dimes cut out all the glorious, green, rolling, vista of the Great Smoky. Just put them in front of your eyes and put them close. The mountains are still there smiling in the sun.

But you don't see them because there's dimes in front of each eye. It doesn't take much money. We who don't have much money are always taking the sniper marks.

That's the rich man. But brother, you can be rich and only have ten dollars. Because if it is between you and your God, then that cloud, that cloud is concealing God from you.

And then there's people, just plain people. The Lord tells us that we shouldn't be afraid of man with his breath and his nostrils. And yet there are people, we're Christians, who are, have a cloud of fear about us.

Constantly a cloud of fear. They want us to be, they want us to be here in this society. And the sociologists tell us we must do this, that we must adjust to society.

And the schools are busy. Instead of teaching the history and writing and reading and arithmetic and all the rest, they're teaching the children to adjust so as not to be queer and to get along well. Well, if you've got that as your goal, you have a cloud over your heart, my Christian friends.

And then there are our friends. And then there's the position we hold, whatever it may be. And then there's the loved ones.

And this is the tenderest and perhaps the hardest. But that's all got to go. You say, then what do I do with it? If this cloud is all over my head, is a cloud of safety ill meant? And my father's smiling at me, and I can't see his face.

What shall I do? Well, the old brother suggests, and I borrow what he suggests to you as a beautiful illustration, he calls it a cloud of forgetting. He said, put this cloud that's above you under your feet. There's a cloud of forgetting.

And Paul said exactly the same thing, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forth under those things which are before. You see, the things which were behind Paul were a cloud. And if they'd been in front of him, then he'd shut out God, but he put them behind him, his deceit, his mistakes, his blunders, his errors, his wrongs, the times he'd fallen on his face, and the time the Lord had to take him before his time, and all this he'd put them behind him and under his feet as a cloud of forgetting.

And the old man, as God says, put them underneath, and have them up between thee and thy God, like so to the cloud of forgetting beneath thee, between thee and all the creatures that ever God made. We've got to get that cloud of forgetting under our feet. And, of course, that's the job of the Christian, and that's why I'm preaching like this, and some are understanding they're going to do something about it, others are not.

Others have come up to me and taken me by me, wanting me to move, and have turned back into the wilderness. It's because, like so, for the cloud of forgetting, of forgetting. Now the face of God, I repeat, is smiling still, and not all the clouds I've met, and not all the clouds the devil can blow up there, and the devil can blow up a storm and put it between you, and the face of your God, experientially, but remember that God is waiting within you there, or the king of the city, and he's waiting for you to move up, to move up.

I remember getting on a train at LaGuardia Field in New York some years ago. It was about, I would say, 3 o'clock in the afternoon. And the smiling, relaxed, friendly pilot came out and made a little speech.

He knew that old duckers like me would worry about it because it was raining. Rainy, miserable day, like when you get here sometimes. Just, just plain miserable.

And he said, now, we are leaving in a moment. And he said, the situation is this, friend. In 15 minutes, we'll be in the sunlight.

In 15 minutes, we'll be in the sunlight. And he said, the weather report shows that it will be clean from here to Chicago. And sure enough, it was.

He had a friend in Chicago. And so we got into that train, almost feeling our way there through the smog and the mist, and in 15 minutes, we'd hit the cloud under our feet. And the bright shining sun above, and as we rose, even the cloud became white beneath us.

You've flown a lot, have had the experience of seeing that gray, gray billows of the trees that are underneath you, quite as thick as, and when you were underneath them and looked up, there were a misty, miserable, smoggy thing that cut out the sun. But in 15 minutes, you put them under your feet. And, oh brother, is it nice to take off in that smoke and rain and fly all the way 900 miles in the sun.

Now, you're going to have to put this under your feet. You're going to have to get busy about it, to do something about this. And more than sit and take in some more, you're going to have to work on yourself, contradict yourself.

But he says he will, without which he wouldn't. Doesn't he? He'll hit the clouds under you, he'll hit the clouds under you. What does a man do in an airplane? Now, I, being of the lander's type, I help the pilot.

I keep balance in the thing, as an attorney. Now, really, I do. But I'm going to let him over.

Oh, they have every seat in the wide world. He says, he's not going up. And they think the sun will be shining when it is.

Now, put it under you, my friend. Put it under you. What do you get? Well, I'd say money, people, friends, conditions, fortune in real life.

Oh, it is. He is a jealous rival, and he's a jealous lover, and he suffers no rival. And whatever rival, I don't say that you're not going to him.

I do not say that you're not justified. I say that this means this ability perfectly to love him and we're willing to save him. What has been choked out and smitten down, and this will last, and we lack it.

Because we will not put under him. Let it rise between us. It is I take the hand of love.

Take it from his mind. With this eternal promise sign, I take thee under me. I take thee.

Blessed God, I give myself to thee. And I again. No thought is ever to be erected again.

The face of God smiles on his people, but the cloud is hiding. Your cloud, my cloud. But you say that's true.

To me, that's true. That's what it is. But that couldn't be true of the gospel people.

It is true of the masses of the people. To get a little bit of oil. And they said, we'll take this tool of God's.

If we continue in the direction we've been moving. That is it. For as we take the world.

One life. And we dear Christians have been walking around. And put all these things.

We Christians and all. We're discouraged. We're blue.

We've been dismayed. All these people. We decided under their feet.

To put it all. Not trying to tell them what to do. Or how to do it.

But we never knew before.

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