

In the Presence of God

by David Ravenhill

The presence of God is the experience of being in His immediate presence, where we can sense His love, peace, and joy, and it is essential to prioritize this presence above all else.

Duration: 48:58

Scripture: Genesis 1:1, Exodus 14:14, Exodus 32:7, Exodus 33:1, Job 26:14, Psalm 19:1, Matthew 6:33

Topics: "Presence of God"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the concept of God as a covenant-keeping God. He starts by highlighting how Moses effectively prayed to God based on the covenant, leading to God changing his mind about the punishment he had planned for his people. The preacher then shifts to the book of Song of Solomon, emphasizing its intimate nature and how it reveals a deeper satisfaction than worldly pleasures. The sermon concludes with a focus on Moses being in the presence of God in Exodus 33, highlighting the importance of seeking God above all else.

Transcript

What a joy to be with you. Good to see hungry people, isn't it? Doesn't matter about the building, this is not the church. I always get irritated when the worship leader says, it's good to be in the house of the Lord this morning.

And I cry out inside, no, it's better to be the house of the Lord this morning. This is not the house of God. Keeps the rain off and the cold weather, but we are the house of God.

The Almighty has chosen to dwell within us. What an amazing, amazing thing. Let's look to the Lord in prayer, shall we? Father, once again, we recognize our need of you.

Unless you build a house, we toil and labor in vain. Father, we think of the disciples that toiled all night, Lord, caught nothing. Yet just one word and they brought in a harvest.

So, Lord, teach us to hear your voice, to recognize your voice, to walk in obedience to that voice, we pray, in Jesus' name. I've been toying with what to share. I just want to go back to a message I've given many, many times, but I want to talk to you about the presence of God.

In the book of Job, there is a verse that says, Job 26. Let me give you the exact reference here. Job 26 and verse 14, King James reads this way, Lo, these are a part of His ways, but how little a portion has

heard of Him.

These are a part of His ways, but how little a portion has heard of Him. My wife and I raised our three daughters in the city of Christchurch, which is the largest city in the South Island of New Zealand, a city of about 300,000 people. It was destroyed a couple of years ago by an earthquake, pretty well destroyed, having to be rebuilt.

But not too far from the hub of that city that was built around an old Anglican or Episcopal church, there is a museum. It's called the Canterbury Museum. Canterbury is a province in which Christchurch is located, sort of like you would have the state.

And the museum dates back to the 1800s. It's still there. It survived the earthquake.

As you go in the main entranceway, there is that verse of Scripture from Job right over the doorway. These are a part of His ways, but how little a portion do we hear of Him? I have taken the kids when they were younger into that place many, many times, gone down the various corridors, looked in all the display cabinets, admired God's handiwork, seen children point to some reptile or whatever and say, Mommy, what's that? Or Daddy, where does that come from? What sort of an animal is that? What sort of a snake is that? And so on and so forth. And yet in all the hours that I've spent in that museum, I don't ever remember hearing anybody attribute all that handiwork to God Himself.

And so that verse is a fitting verse. These are a part of His ways. He is the creator of all these sayings, but how little a portion do we hear of Him? And as I've said many times, while that may be a good verse to put over a museum, it is a tragic verse to put over the house of God.

And yet we could write it over so many congregations. These are just a part of His ways. One of the tragedies, I think, in America is the fact that we have built entire movements around parts.

We have a faith movement. Nothing wrong with faith, but that's a part. We have a prosperity movement.

Nothing wrong with prosperity, but that's a part. Signs and wonders, holiness movement, evangelism movement, whatever sort of movement it is, but you put all those parts together, you have a person. And His name is the Lord Jesus Christ.

And as I've studied the lives of great men and women of God, not only in the Word of God, but down through the years, I've come to this one conclusion. They all had one common denominator, and that was an insatiable longing for the presence of God. Just that longing, Paul, that I may know Him.

Not anything else. I just want to know Him. Here was a man caught up to the third heaven, saw things that even today we don't know what he actually saw.

And yet, he still says, I'm not satisfied. I press on. Not that I've already attained, but I want to know Him.

Jeremiah says, if you boast about anything, don't boast in your riches. There's a prosperity message gone right there. Don't boast about your strength.

Whether you can rip a telephone book in half doesn't impress God. Don't boast about your wisdom, how many PhDs you have. My father said, you can have 30 degrees and still be frozen.

But boast in this, that you know and you understand me. That's really all that matters, isn't it? And again, as you read through the Word of God, you see man, time after time, David, one thing have I desired of the Lord. Not two or three or four or five, but one thing have I desired of the Lord, and that what I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, just to behold the beauty of the Lord.

Nothing else. David just, you know, as we would bask in the sun on a warm day, David just wanted to bask in the presence of God. That was the thing that gave him life more than anything else.

I'd rather be a doorkeeper in the house of the Lord than dwell in the tents of weakness. Just one day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. We sang that song this morning, you know, the deer pants for the water brook.

So long is my soul after thee, O Lord. I was with a man many years ago up in a place called Moses Lake in Washington State. And he drew my attention to that verse in a way I'd never thought of it before.

He said the only reason the deer or the heart is panting is he says it's been pursued. He said David as a shepherd would no doubt sit there, maybe on a ledge of rock overlooking the valley, keeping his eye out on the sheep. And daily the deer would sort of saunter by and they'd make their way down into the water brook, drink their fill, disappear into the thicket.

But he says on this occasion the deer is panting. And he says the deer goes flying by and they can hear the heaving and the panting of that deer because it's being chased by a predator. And that deer, he says, knows there is only one place of protection and that's to find its way into the water brook because there in the water brook, again, the trail cannot be picked up.

The scent is lost. So he says the water brook becomes a place of protection. He says not only that, but the water brook becomes a place of satisfaction because there it can replenish again that exhausted, weary, tired body and drinking that cool life-giving water.

And he said I believe David wrote this psalm when he was being pursued by Saul. And he saw himself as the deer being chased and Saul hounding him and here he is running from place to place and from cave to cave, from city to city, from nation to nation for a while. And he knows there's only one place of protection, Lord, it's to come under the shadow of the Almighty because there under the shadow of Your presence nothing can touch me.

But he says not only that, but it's a place of satisfaction because there the river of God is full of water. And His presence is fullness of joy. At His right hand are pleasures forevermore and you can drink here in just the presence of God.

I've never forgotten that. Every time I read that psalm, one of the old Scottish hymns talks about that. It puts it in that sort of phraseology.

I can't quote it right now, but it talks about the heart being pursued. And David again, just this longing for God's presence. Who have I in heaven but Thee? And there is nothing on earth, he says, that I desire beside Thee.

You know, the first part of that verse I think is pretty easy to agree with. Who have I in heaven but Thee? My mother's there, my father's there, my nephew, friends, relatives, and so on. The second part of the verse is the most challenging.

And there is nothing on earth I desire beside Thee. When every time you turn on television or drive down the road, there's a billboard or an ad crying out, screaming at you, you'll never be happy until you drive this sort of car, have these sort of clothes, you know, have Armstrong tiles, you know, granite countertops type thing. And David is able to overlook all of that.

Here he was a king. Everything was at his disposal, and yet he came to the realization, Lord, there is nothing on earth I desire beside You. I'm not sure if I'm quite there yet, but I'm certainly getting there.

Nothing on earth that really satisfies. Turn with me, if you will, to the book of Exodus this morning. Exodus chapter 33.

Look at this chapter. Moses is actually in the presence of God. He's been called by God to go up the mountain, and God has begun to reveal Himself to him.

And in the meantime, the children of Israel, of course, have become restless. They've gone to Aaron. Moses' brother demanded that he produce some sort of a guard that will go before them.

They're convinced that Moses has fallen down some crevasse or something, broken his neck, and he's not coming back. So the weeks have gone by, and the pressure is building. And listen, we need somebody that's going to lead us and so Aaron gathers all the jewelry from the ladies, throws it into the fire, and out pops a golden calf.

That's the way he described it anyway. It's amazing what comes out of our mouth when we get backed into a corner, isn't it? And God sees what is going on. He says to Moses, listen, you'd better get down right away.

Get down the mountain. I'm in the wrong chapter. It's chapter 32.

Verse 7, the Lord said to Moses, go down at once for your people, who you brought up from the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves. They've turned aside from the way which I commanded them. They've made for themselves a molten calf.

They've worshipped it. They've sacrificed to it and said, this is your God, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. Amazing how quickly the children of Israel have turned aside, isn't it? Here is a nation that has seen some of the greatest signs and wonders that we see anywhere in the Word of God up until the present.

We will not see signs and wonders of this magnitude until the book of Revelation is fulfilled. Many of the signs and wonders of the Old Testament eclipse by far those of the New Testament. I don't know if you've ever thought of it that way, but if you were applying for a job and the man in front of you said, listen, I turn water into wine.

You think, well, that's pretty impressive. And then bound to get the job if I can do something like that. And the guy behind you says, hey, just a minute.

I turn the Nile to blood. The man in front of you says, well, I fed 5,000 people with a little boy's lunch one day. And the man behind you said, that's nothing.

I fed 2 million people for 40 years with nothing at all, not even a little boy's lunch. In other words, if you compare the Old Testament miraculous with the New, it far outweighs it. They saw signs and wonders of a

magnitude that we have never seen since.

Water coming out of a rock that satisfied the needs of, if we put animals and people together, maybe 10, 15, 20, 30 million. A water supply for 30 million coming out of a rock. The Bible says it was like the ocean depths.

You know, we think of it as just a little babbling stream. No, it had to satisfy the needs of 2 million people at least and all of their livestock. And they saw all those things and yet how quickly they turned aside.

And here they are now bowing down to an idol that they've made and not only is there idolatry involved, but there's immorality. They've basically stripped themselves naked. They're having a sexual orgy.

But that wasn't the worst thing. The worst thing was the fact that they'd robbed God of His glory. Because there in verse 8 it says, this is your God that brought you up out of the land of Egypt.

I think one of the most dangerous things we can do is touch the glory of God. God says, I'll share My love, My kindness, My patience, My grace, My forgiveness, My peace, My joy, all of those things, but My glory I will not share with any man. And they were robbing God of His glory, attributing all those signs, wonders, and miracles to the work of their own hands.

And it's so easy to do that, isn't it? You know, My healing gift or My prophetic gift, we're attributing all of those great things to our own effort, our own brilliance, our own expertise of whatever it is. And that's what they were doing. And God is angry, possibly the angriest you ever see God in the Old Testament.

And He says to Moses, just leave Me alone. Get out of My sight basically that I may destroy this people. And I will make of you a great nation, verse 10.

You see the incredible humility of a man like Moses here because God is ready to replace a nation that were able to look back and say, you know, I can trace My pedigree, if you like, back to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, these great men that the Bible refers to as the fathers of the faith, Abraham being the father. And God is saying, listen, I'm going to start all over again. And I'm going to raise a nation up through you, Moses, and no longer will that nation look to the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, but the God of Moses.

How many of you could turn down an offer like that? I'm going to build an entire movement around you, Ravenhill. Around you. And this man says no.

And he begins to pray. Verse 13, Remember Abraham and Isaac and Israel, Thy servants, to whom Thou didst swear. You said to them, All this land that I have spoken, I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.

Moses now on the basis of God's covenant. He comes before God. I've got some papers here.

He's basically saying, God, listen, we have covenants. Covenants that You made. These contracts, if you like.

It's got Your signature right here. You promised. You made a covenant.

Your very name is at stake. Your very reputation is at stake. You cannot do what You said You would do.

And if You do, we will never trust You again. Because Your Word obviously is no longer reliable. You say one thing and You change Your mind and You do something else.

You renege on Your promises. After all, You said heaven and earth will pass away. My Word will never pass away.

You're the great promise keeper. You said all the promises are yea and amen in Christ. I mean, this is his argument in prayer.

He's coming before God and he's holding these contracts. He says, God, You promised us. These are the things that kept us going all those years of bondage and servitude was the fact that one day You said we would have our own land.

One day we'll have a land flowing with milk and honey and so on and so forth. And now You're talking about throwing all of that overboard. God, You cannot do it.

And God says, You got me. Notice there in verse 14, the Lord changed His mind about the evil that He said He would do to His people. And so on the basis of covenant, Moses again is effective in his prayer.

We go to the next chapter now. And it is now God's turn to remind man that He is a covenant-keeping God. The previous chapter we just looked at, it's a man reminding God that He's a covenant-keeping God.

Now God says to Moses, Moses, depart from here, verse 1. You and the people that you brought up from the land of Egypt to the land that I swore, notice to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying to your seed, I will give it. I can imagine this news as it began to spread throughout the camp was exciting news. This was the word that they'd waited for for all those years of servitude and bondage.

This, if you like, was the carrot at the end of the stick that kept the nation of Israel going through all the pressure and hardship was one day we will go in to a land that flows with milk and honey. And Moses gets the word. This is the day.

I want you to lead the people. Tell them to pack up their belongings and so on. We are heading in to the promised land.

He says, go up to a land that flows with milk and honey. Now literally, it didn't overflow with milk and honey. They were not wading through knee-deep honey and wading across rivers of milk, but it was descriptive again of what God was wanting to give them.

You can read more about it there in Deuteronomy 6, verse 10. It shall come about when the Lord your God brings you into the land which He swore to your fathers, to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, to give you great and splendid cities. And then He adds a very important PS, which you did not build.

In other words, God is no respecter of persons. I am going to give you back great and splendid cities. Imagine if God had stopped there, they would have sighed because all of their life prior to this, all they'd done their entire life as slaves was build cities.

In fact, the psalmist says, I've relieved your shoulder of the burden. In the margin of my Bible it says, literally, I've taken the brick part off your shoulder. This was a nation that was bowed down from the youngest to the oldest.

Day after day after day, they staggered under the weight of bricks building these great big cities for Pharaoh. And God's keeping a record of it. And He says, listen, one day I'll give you back your own cities.

PS, you don't have to build them. Then He says, there'll be cities that are full of good things, or houses full of good things, which you did not fill, hewn cisterns which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant. This was the promise that God had given them.

And God says, now I want you to go in and possess the land. I can imagine the excitement. The excitement building finally.

We are going to go in again to beautiful homes loaded with good things, vineyards and olive trees. And then God drops a bombshell and He says, I'm not going with you. You're on your own.

Notice there in verse 3, for I will not go in your midst because you're an obstinate people unless I destroy you on the way. I don't know about you, but Moses has a problem on his hand. He's got two million people that long to see the fulfillment of God's promise.

And yet now he's got word from God that God is not going with him. And so he faces a choice. Do I go or do I stay? Do I go in to all the blessings of God? And they were blessings.

They were godly blessings. Houses and lands, all of those things were part of the covenant that God had made with them. Do I enter into all the covenantal blessings of God and yet not have the presence of God? This is a frightening chapter.

It really is. You see, I think there are movements of men that discovered the basis of extracting from God the miraculous healings, all the promises based on His covenant and yet don't have an awareness of the presence of God. That's frightening.

In other words, God says, listen, I'm not going to renege on all those promises. The land is there. The houses are there.

The vineyards are there. Houses are full of good things. I'm not going to back down on that.

It's yours. I promised them. Go ahead.

I'm going to keep my promise. Go in. But I'm not going.

And now Moses again is faced with this dilemma. What do I do? Now if you had to cast your ballot this morning on the way out, you had to say, am I going to have the presence of God and nothing else? Let me describe to you where they are. The Bible says they're in a waste, howling wilderness.

No houses, no lands, no vineyards, no olive trees. Not exactly what we would call the American dream. Nothing.

Absolute barrenness. The only way you can even survive is to have the shelter of the cloud over you by day. Temperatures would plummet literally 60, 80 degrees.

So you had to have a fire by night. So God had a cloud that covered them by day because the sun will not smite you by day, but also the moon by night. They had to have air conditioning by the day and heating by night.

God provided that. But that's the only way you survive in the wilderness. But nothing else.

You can't plant anything because nothing will grow. Again, it's a waste, howling wilderness. As far as the eye can see, nothing but sand, but you have the presence of God.

So that's choice A. Choice B is to have all the blessings. Houses, lands, vineyards, olive trees, houses full of all good things, all the luxuries, if you like, that God is able to give and you've got to cast your ballot this morning. That's the dilemma that Moses is facing.

What would your choice be? Do you have that sort of a hunger for the presence of God that you could give up everything else? The Bible says having nothing and yet possessing all things. Or having all things and yet really possessing nothing. Let me sweeten the deal for you because some of you are tempted.

After all, wouldn't it be great to have your own house? Loaded. Not some old derelict house that's got to be refurbished where you're going to spend the next 10 years fixing it up. No.

Houses full of good things. Let me sweeten the deal because God says in verse 2, I'll send an angel before you. And the angel will drive out the Amorite or the Canaanite, Amorite, the Hittite, the Perizzite, the Jebusite, the Hivite.

In other words, this angel will do signs, wonders, miracles. This angel will do things that you're incapable of doing. So now we have at least a little bit of spirituality in there.

We've got our houses. We've got all the material things you could ever dream of. But we also have signs, wonders, and miracles thrown into the deal.

But still, no presence of God. So now what would your choice be? I mean, angels are popular these days. He doesn't say I'll send a demon because you've been bad boys.

He says I'll send an angel. And that angel will help you. That angel will do things that you are incapable of doing.

But I'm not going. Well, Moses had an advantage that the children of Israel did not have. We have a saying.

I've been there and done that. Moses was raised a son of Pharaoh's daughter. He was raised in the house that was loaded with good things in an extreme sense, the White House of the day, so to speak.

Daddy was, or at least Grandpa, was the king. He was the Pharaoh. His mother that had adopted him was the king's daughter.

He was raised with the finest clothes, the latest model chariot to drive around in, no doubt. Went to the best school. Had everything that a rich kid could possibly have.

The Bible says there came a day in the life of Moses when he chose to suffer affliction with the people of God rather than all the treasures and pleasures of Egypt. And now he's faced with the same thing and he's already made up his mind, but he's got to, first of all, pray. And so he does what he does so well.

He begins to pray. Notice what he says there. And Moses said to the Lord, verse 13, Now therefore, I pray Thee, if I find favor in Your sight, let me know Thy ways that I may know Thee, that I may find favor in Your

sight.

Consider too that this nation is Thy people. It's a strange prayer, I think, given the circumstances, given the setting. Moses is not saying to God, listen, there's a part of me that really wants Your presence.

There's a part of me that loves houses and lands and vineyards. Can't we have some sort of compromise? Wouldn't it be nice if at least You showed up every once in a while? I know we get on your nerves. I can tell body language.

You're still upset from the other day when you said you were going to destroy us. We say things when we're upset that we regret later. Now that you've had a good rest, let's talk.

God says, what do you mean, let's talk? You say, I'm going to take you up on your offer. What offer? Let's reason together. Oh yeah, okay.

This would be my prayer anyway. God, let's reason together. I appreciate the houses and lands and vineyards.

There's a part of me that wants Your presence as well. That would be the way my prayer would have gone. Can't we strike some sort of a deal here? You don't have to hang around us all the time.

I know we get on your nerves a little bit. It would be nice if You showed up at least for the great feast days that You ordained. Every once in a while, we've got to sense Your presence.

But the rest of the week, we really don't need You. In fact, the rest of the month, we're educated. We've got our degrees and we get along pretty well without You most of the time.

You're a present help in time of trouble, and so we use You as a sort of a backup. Let's face it, that's the way we treat God, isn't it? And yet, Moses never mentions anything other than I want to know You. I want to know You.

And the Lord responds in verse 14, My presence will go with You, and I will give You rest. I think if we could read between the lines here, God is saying, listen, if you hunger for Me to that extent, if you have such a longing for My presence, how can I refuse? Verse 15, and Moses responds, If Your presence does not go with us, do not lead us from here. In other words, Moses has made up his mind when he went into that closet to pray, if I can't convince God to go with us, I would rather stay here with absolutely nothing and have the presence of God than go into the Promised Land and have everything and not have the presence of God.

So if Your presence doesn't go with us, we're not going. And then he makes this statement in verse 16, which I think is one of the most beautiful statements in the Word of God. How can it be known that I have found favor in Your sight, I and Thy people? Is it not by Thy going with us, so that we, I and Thy people, may be distinguished from all the other people who are on the face of the earth? Moses said, God, there's only one thing that makes us unique, only one thing that distinguishes us from everybody else on the face of the earth.

It's not our kosher diet. It's not our long sideburns. It's not the clothes that we wear.

It's not even the tabernacle. Not even the Sabbath day. Not even the Ten Commandments, as good as all those things are.

The only thing that makes us unique is Your presence. And I'm sure Moses is thinking, listen, we are surrounded by nations that have got their gods. Those gods have got their temples.

Those temples have got their holy days and they've got their priests. They've got their sacrificial systems. They've got their songs and so on, but they don't have the presence of God.

And if you take your presence from us, we just have a form of godliness. We go through the mechanics. We go through the ritual just like every other religion.

The only thing that makes us unique, that separates us, that makes us distinguished is Your presence. And that has never changed. It's just as real today as it was back then.

If God's presence isn't here, we might as well pack up. It's all just a waste of time. Now, we've been looking at men that have got this longing for the presence of God.

But to have a relationship with God, God, I want to know You. God has got to reveal Himself to us, doesn't He? It's impossible to have a relationship with somebody that doesn't want to have a relationship with You. You can beg, you can scream, you can do everything else, but if they just never talk, don't want to hang around You, then it's pretty hard to have a relationship.

Turn with me to Song of Solomon, and we'll look at the other side of the story, as it were, this very intimate book, this book that many of the Orthodox Jews would not allow their young people to read until they were approaching marriage. They felt it was too much of a revelation on intimacy and so on. It begins there in verse 2 of chapter 1. Kiss me with the kisses of Your mouth.

Your love is better than wine. She has come to the realization that listen, there is something more exhilarating, more stimulating, more satisfying and gratifying than wine. Wine, of course, is what the world turns to to drown its sorrows many times.

When there's bad news, you know, somebody is diagnosed with some incurable disease, or you get laid off your job or whatever, the only coping mechanism for the world is alcohol. You know, at least it alleviates for a little while the sadness and gives you a little sense of joy and so on. But she says, listen, I found something that is better than the finest wine.

It's just being in Your embrace. Kiss me again with the kisses of Your mouth. Let me know Your presence.

Let me know Your arms around me. That's better. It satisfies more than anything else.

And so they begin this relationship together. He says, You're beautiful, my darling. Verse 15.

Her response, verse 16, You're pretty handsome yourself. How handsome you are, my beloved. This is all in sort of a little bit of Elizabethan English, as you know.

He takes her into the banqueting table. His banner over her is love. I think that's the beginning of Hallmark greeting cards right there.

He comes into the restaurant. Here he's got this lavish banner prepared. Matilda or whatever her name was.

I love you, my darling. And she's sort of somewhat embarrassed. And then she thinks, wow, I can't believe this guy.

He went to all the trouble to put a banner up in my honor. Boy, he really does love me, doesn't he? They skip over the hills together. You know the story.

And then we come to chapter 5. Chapter 5, there's a little bit of a setback in their relationship. We pick it up in verse 2. I was asleep, but my heart was awake. A voice, my beloved, was knocking open to me.

My sister, my darling, my dove, my perfect one. My head is drenched with dew, my locks with the damp of the night. He's shown up.

She is not expecting him. And she's already gone to bed. And now there's a little bit of a problem that she's facing because he wants to come in.

He wants to spend time with her. And she is contemplating whether it's worth it or not. Notice in verse 3, I've taken off my dress.

How can I put it on again? I've washed my feet. How can I dirty them again? And I don't think she verbalizes that. Maybe they had some sort of secret knock between them.

Maybe he's a businessman. Maybe he's away for a week or so. She says, listen, darling, when you get back, please, I don't care how late it is, whatever day you get back, please come around.

Let me know you're home safely. Obviously, no tweeting in those days, no telephones, no communication, no e-mails. And so maybe she's wondering when is he coming back.

I know it's going to be sometime this week or something. And he keeps his promise and he shows up and she's already in bed. It's a night scene.

And her immediate thought is, you know, that's him. I know his knock. But oh, man, I'm just so comfortable the way I am.

I just got ready for bed. I've had a shower. My feet are clean.

I've taken off my clothes, my dress. And now I've got to get out of bed, put on my dress again. After he goes, I'm going to have to wash my feet again, get ready for bed again.

And so she hesitates. She stalls. And he begins to knock again.

Verse 4, My beloved extended his hand through the opening. My feelings were aroused for him. And so maybe he's rattling the doorknob.

I don't know. But he's making his intentions known. This is one that he loves.

This is his darling, his dove, his perfect one. And he wants to see her. He can't wait to have fellowship with her.

Verse 5, I arose, she said, and I opened to my beloved. My hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with liquid myrrh on the handles of the bolt. I opened to my beloved, but my beloved had turned and had gone.

Now, one of the things we don't know here in this story, and I wish we did, we don't know the amount of time that went by. It would be nice if at the side of the Bible it told you how many minutes or how many hours or how many weeks and so on. You read the life of Abraham, and God seems to be showing up every day type thing.

But there's vast passages of time, years in between some of those visitations. I think here there's many, many minutes. She may be the sort of gal that every hair has to be just perfect and mascara has to be on or whatever they wore in those days.

And so he's waiting patiently. He's made his intentions known, and he waits and he waits and he waits and he waits. Thirty minutes back there.

Forty minutes back there. We wait sometimes, don't we? And eventually, he gets the message. Maybe she doesn't love me anymore.

You know when you don't have information, you manufacture it. Isn't that right? You know, she seemed fine when I left a couple of weeks ago on this trip. You know, she was the one that begged that I come around as soon as I get back home.

But maybe she's met a boyfriend on Facebook, you know. Maybe somebody else has shown up. Maybe she got tired of waiting for me.

Maybe she really didn't love me the way she said she did anyway. Maybe somebody else has come along, you know. The mind begins to... And he waits and he waits and finally, he leaves.

He's hurt. He's grieved. He's wounded.

But the thing I love about this story is that she doesn't go back to bed. Even though it's the middle of the night, she gets up. She's obviously dressed.

She grabs her shawl and she heads out into the streets. My heart went out to him as he spoke. I searched, but I did not find him.

I called and he did not answer me. The watchmen who make the rounds of the city found me. They struck me and wounded me.

The guardsmen on the wall took away my shawl. So now she's suffering. She's being wounded.

Her shawl has been taken away. It's the night again. He said my head is drenched with the dew of the night.

So now she's soaking. And yet she's determined. She's determined to restore a broken relationship.

A relationship that once was flourishing. My darling, my dove, my perfect one. You know, you're beautiful.

You're handsome. And so on, kissing each other and so on. But now the relationship is gone.

And she realizes she's made a mistake. She realizes she's blown it. And she's out trying to reconcile.

She's out trying to find him. And so she wanders around the city of Jerusalem. And she comes across these women that are making their way home.

Verse 8, I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved. In other words, I plead with you. If you find my beloved, tell him I'm lovesick.

In other words, if you see my beloved, tell him I'm sorry. Tell him I'm lovesick. I can't live without him.

I can't live without his presence. Please let him know. If you see my beloved, make sure you let him know I'm searching for him.

And their response, what kind of beloved is your beloved? O most beautiful among women, what kind of beloved is your beloved that thus you adjure us? And here they're looking at this woman now and even though she's wounded, maybe got a bloody nose or a black eye or something, and she's lost her shawl, she's still beautiful. And these women look at her and say, you are the most beautiful woman we've ever seen. But what's so special about this guy you're talking about? Now imagine if you were in that situation, in the middle of Bottlesville, two o'clock in the morning.

You know, you walk around the corner and hear this girl comes up frantically. You know, she's all emotional. Stop, stop, stop.

Have you seen my boyfriend? You know, and she's got a black eye, bloody nose. What would you think? Another case of codependency. Married to this druggie.

They've had an argument. He's left the house. She's out there.

Crazy woman. She can't live without him even though she's been rough. I mean, what would go through your mind? I think I'd ask the same question.

Hey, why do you want this guy back? What's so special about him anyway? And all of a sudden she opens up. My beloved, verse 10, is dazzling. He's ruddy.

He's outstanding among 10,000. Listen, if you had 10,000 men and you lined them up here in Jerusalem, my beloved would eclipse every single one of them. He's stunning.

He's striking. You could pick him out of a lineup. No problem.

He is so handsome. His head is like gold, like pure gold. His locks are like clusters of dates, as black as a raven.

His eyes are like doves beside streams of water. She goes on. His cheeks are like beds of balsam.

His hands are like rods of gold. His abdomen is like carved ivory. Now notice, she's not describing his assets.

She's describing him. She doesn't say, listen, have you ever heard of Bill Gates and Donald Trump? My beloved would make those guys look like porpoise. He owns a cattle on a thousand hills.

In fact, you know that huge mansion or place down around the bend there, down near the river? That's the house he's building. When we get married, I'm going to have everything I could ever dream of. All the silks, the linens, the diamonds, the sapphires.

He is loaded. All she talks about is how beautiful he is. You see, she knows him.

Knows him in detail. Let me tell you about his hands. Let me tell you about his eyes.

Let me tell you about his hair. But she's lost him. I think that describes in many ways the church, all they can describe him.

They've got all the doctrine down pat, but they've lost somehow the lover of their soul. And they're satisfied with just knowing about him. And she isn't.

Verse 16, she summarizes it all. His mouth is full of sweetness. He's wholly desirable.

In other words, there's not a single thing I would tweak, not a single thing I would change. You know, most marriages, we won't be that honest this morning, most marriages if you said, you know, if you could just change one or two things about your spouse. Most of us would, yep.

You know. If she'd only, you know, if he'd only, you know. No, he's wholly desirable.

I can't fault him. This is my beloved, and this is my friend or daughters of Jerusalem. Notice their response.

Where is your beloved gone? Oh, most beautiful among women. Where is your beloved turned that we may seek him with you? Do you mind if we tag along? Something's changed. Oh, what sort of guy is he? Listen, I'd like to meet him.

Do you mind if I follow you? That's the way it's supposed to be, isn't it? We're supposed to be so in love with him that the world says you've got something. What is it? Oh, it's something different. Oh, it's my beloved.

Let me describe him to you. He's the fairest of 10,000. The trouble is she's lost him even though she knows him so well.

And she's determined to restore this broken relationship. You see, this story is told one more time in the Bible. Revelation 3. Behold, I stand at the door and knock.

Oh, I know we use that verse to lead children to Christ and so on, but really it's the head of the church. It's the bridegroom knocking on the door of the bride and saying, My darling, my dove, my perfect one, I want to come in. I want to sup with you.

I want to be with you. I love you. I gave my life for you.

Would you open the door? Would you let me in? Not really. Try the church down the road. We're rich.

We're increased with goods. We have need of nothing. Not even you.

Oh, we've just got a brand new building. Passes on television now. He's written a number of books.

We've got 600-700 people coming. We don't pray like we used to. Lord, try that church down the road.

They're struggling. It tends to be that way, doesn't it? You see, the problem with this girl was this. I've taken off my dress.

How can I put it on again? I've washed my feet. How can I dirty them again? The Bible says that if your feet are washed, all of you are washed. Remember, Jesus came to Peter and He says, Peter, let Me wash your feet.

And Peter says, no way. And Jesus said, listen, Peter, if I don't wash your feet, you can have no part of me. He said, well, then give Me a bath.

No, if your feet are washed, you're clean. This woman was clean and nothing wrong with being clean. But she was also comfortable and that was the problem.

Clean but comfortable. So comfortable she didn't want to go any deeper. So comfortable she didn't want to go that extra mile.

And I think that's the dangerous place. Sin is one thing, but woe unto those that are ease in Zion. Woe to those that settle down right in Zion, right in the place of God's presence and they don't want to go any further.

And God wants to bring us into a new place where there's that constant yearning, that constant longing. God, I want to know. I don't care what it takes.

I don't care if I've got to get up in the middle of the night. I don't care where You go. I'm going to pursue You until I find You.

And maybe some of you this morning are in that place where you say, listen, I know I'm clean, but I've settled down. I've become so busy trying to get the job finished or open up this new business or school and all the demands and so on that God's sort of being pushed to the back burner, if you like. And these are men, again, that have that longing for God's presence.

And this morning, I sense that. I know that's where your heart is. I feel that.

I can feel it being drawn out of me. But maybe not everybody's in that place this morning. Maybe you're a visitor here and you're attracted to the fact that listen, there's something different going on here.

It's not church as usual. It's not just a ritual and a routine. And you say, I want that.

You know, I want that. I want something more. Let's close in prayer.

Father, You alone can satisfy that longing. Lord, there's nothing the world has to offer that can bring true satisfaction. Perishing things of clay born but for one brief day, take from my heart away.

Father, wean us from the things of the world. Give us a fresh longing, a fresh hunger. Father, whet our appetite again for Your presence.

Lord, we would not stop short of all that You have for us. Lord, I pray for this congregation that it would be a congregation built around the presence of God more than anything else. Lord, people would walk in again and sense that, Lord, this is holy ground.

Lord, Your Word says the mountains melt at Your presence. Father, we pray as people walk into this building and come into the presence of this congregation that, Lord, the mountains, emotional mountains and physical mountains and, Lord, demonic mountains would just simply melt because of Your divine

presence. Father, take us deeper.

Father, take us as that song says, past the outer court, Lord, through those gates of praise right into the very presence of the King of kings and the Lord of lords. Keep us in that place, Lord, of absolute dependency upon You. Lord, You said man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

Speak to us, Lord. Give us that bread today. Nourish us.

Touch our lives that way. These altars are open this morning if you need to. Just make your way forward as the team just leads us in whatever song they have.

You want to just come and say, Lord, I need a fresh touch this morning. Lord, I have drifted. I'm in that place of lukewarmness, satisfaction.

I know I'm clean. I know I'm a child of God, son of God, daughter of God, but I'm not where I should be. Lord, I want to go deeper this morning.

Touch my life again.

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