

Acts 3 19

by Mack Tomlinson

This sermon focuses on the experience of God's manifest presence, drawing parallels from Acts chapter 3 and the sudden outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Providence Chapel. It emphasizes the importance of immediate repentance, obedience to the Holy Spirit, not waiting for emotional experiences to respond to God, exercising faith, welcoming and cultivating God's presence, and continually seeking the Holy Spirit's work. The message encourages believers to steward the recent move of God and be expectant for ongoing revival.

Scripture: Acts 3:20, Psalm 139:23, Luke 11:13, Exodus 3:2, Psalms 27:8, Acts 2:39, Luke 11:13

Topics: "Experiencing God's Presence", "Stewarding Revival"

Description

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Transcript

If you turn with me to the Acts of the Apostles, Acts chapter 3, one verse, which is a thematic verse, it's a topical verse, addressing something so wonderful, so pertinent, and even applicable to our church, you know, in light of last Sunday, a week ago today, some of you were not there in our service last week, so we certainly hope you can all hear Michael Durham's sermon if you haven't yet. So what happened after the sermon is what I'm going to read about here in this one verse in Acts chapter 3, and we're going to talk about that tonight, about lessons we learned, should learn from last Sunday, and what God did. Acts 3, verse 20, here it is, the first half of the verse, that times or seasons of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.

That times or seasons may come, of refreshing, may come from the presence of the Lord. It's certainly not taking this half of a verse out of context to address it, because what the book of Acts was seeing often was seasons of refreshing, times of refreshing, and when did that happen? It happened when one event happened, the outpouring, the downpouring, the coming, the sending of the Holy Spirit upon God's people, in time, in space, where they were gathered. Seasons of refreshing come at times from the Holy Spirit, and that's exactly what happened at Providence Chapel a week ago today.

It was sudden, it was unexpected in a while, though it had been prayed for, but it was welcomed, and in many of us, we hope everyone in the service that day, it's very effective day, when the Holy Spirit comes, things happen in people's minds, in their hearts, in their emotions, and you will always see a response of some kind, and we did, because the Bible says, God's people shall be willing in the day of your power, they become willing, they respond. And so we all knew that the Holy Spirit was there in a special way some day. If you were there, you knew that, you experienced it, and you may have felt various things.

You might have been scared, if you've never seen a service like that. You may have been intimidated, you might have been in awe, you might have been excited, you might have had joy, you might have been under conviction, but you felt the manifest presence of God. We knew that was the case.

You, we all knew that was the case, because God is everywhere all the time, but there are times the Bible teaches when he draws near, he manifests himself with what George Whitfield called the felt presence of God, and we felt him there. There was a clean heaviness, there was a brooding, there was a sense in the whole room, God was present, and your response may have been different than the person next to you. Some responded outwardly, others responded quietly, privately, but God's presence was manifested.

Suddenly, you know, in a felt way, it was convicting and wonderful at the same time. The felt presence of God's spirit is the beginnings of any true revival. What happens someday is the way ultimately all spiritual awakenings start.

God suddenly sends his spirit in a more felt way, in a real way, and things begin to happen. Signs and wonders, if you will, in hearts and in minds begin to respond. They repent, they weep, they pray, they cry out, they get right with one another.

That's how a revival starts, and so what we experienced Sunday was a mercy drop of greater showers of blessing. What we experienced Sunday is what happens when the spirit of God begins to move in power to bring about revival, to bring about awakening. And so, even if it was only two hours for us on Sunday, a brief time, it was a season of refreshing.

It was a divine moment. It was a moment when suddenly heaven touched earth in a special way at the Senior Center. Heaven touched the gathering of Providence Chapel in that room.

Now, think about this. We're talking about the manifest presence of God and what we need to know and what we need to learn moving forward, because we're stewards of what God did last week. How we respond is very important.

Michael Durham and I were talking about that this week. It is not time to relax and just realize that God blessed us Sunday in a special way. No, we're a steward of that movement of God.

That means, because God did that last Sunday, that means He's choosing to enter prayer and draw near and work. And He wants us to take that joyfully, seriously, in faith, and lay hold of Him even more. We're to be stewards of this.

Now, whether it's a more monumental movement of the Holy Spirit, the Day of Pentecost, 3,000 were converted, or in Northampton, Massachusetts, 1733-1735, in Jonathan Edwards Church, and the whole city was shaken, the whole village. And they say during those months, over 500 in the county were awakened and converted. Whether it's a major movement like that or the briefest real movement of the Spirit, like last Lord's Day in our meeting, the manifest presence of God is real.

It's wonderful. It's divine. It's supernatural.

It's life-changing. And even many evangelicals, even Reformed evangelicals, are scared of this. They think it's emotionalism.

They think it's Pentecostalism. And it's not. It's Bible.

It's God choosing to respond to His people graciously in answer to ongoing prayer. And the real movement of the Spirit is not only life-changing. It's truly needed.

Because we gravitate to dominance. We gravitate to spiritual declension. And the coming of the Spirit quickens us out of that.

Some of us, if it had been a normal Sunday in our spiritual declension, would have gone away, not praying, not confessing, not seeing our need. But it happened because the Spirit came. Things happen spiritually to believers and to churches.

When the Spirit comes, it don't happen otherwise. So God poured out upon us Sunday a mercy drop. But it was a brief outpouring.

It was like an early, brief, spring shower that came. You've seen times when rain would come and it would rain for ten minutes and stop, and then the sun's out an hour later. Or we saw rain this week, and a lot of rain comes.

The ministry of the Spirit is like that. He's a person who moves sovereignly as He wills. And we hear the sounds of it.

We see things as a result. We don't know for whence it comes or where it's going. It's a sovereign work.

Jesus said that's the nature of the work of the Spirit. But we saw it Sunday. And this week, you should have been rejoicing all week in the light of God's presence.

And here's a piercing question. This week, did you think more about the coronavirus than about God? I had to confess this week that I think I thought more about the virus than about God. Even though seven days ago, He did what He did.

Now, I've been rejoicing all week last Sunday. And I've been thinking, what are the lessons? What's the takeaways? What do we need to seal in our hearts and walk in as a result of God working? Because He did that for us to seriously walk in now in hopes that He might continue it. That it won't just be one mercy drop.

When God starts a season of refreshing, a time of refreshing, often it's the church's obedience to God in those times that will cause Him to continue to work. So as Peter said at Pentecost, quoting Joel, we could have said the same thing seven days ago. This is that.

This today, the coming of the Spirit, this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel. Remember what Joel said. I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh.

On my men's servants and my women's servants, I will pour out, shed upon my servants my Spirit. Now, that was fulfilled at Pentecost by way of prophecy. But that's an ongoing reality.

It's a promise of the Father, the sending of the Spirit. Because in Acts, there were more outpourings. Acts 4 and several later.

So this morning, one week later, my question to all of us is, and my message to our church body is this. What is our ongoing responsibility to be to God's presence? Being poured out. What's your responsibility? What's mine? What are we to do? How are we to view this? How are we to be stewards of God's gift of the sending of the Spirit? It was a gift.

And we're stewards of that gift now, of His manifest presence. The fact is, when God moves in a special way, it is such a mercy. It is a token of His love.

It's an evidencing of God drawing near and saying, I love you, and I'm working here, and I want to work. You have been crying out to me. You've been praying for months and months and months and months for me to move in the prayer meetings on Sunday.

I'm doing it now. Here I am. It's a token of His answering prayer.

It's a gift and a blessing to us, brethren. But let our hearts not lose the seriousness of the reality of it. Oh, we'll lose the emotions because the emotions of it don't remain.

They come, and they're good, and they go. And if we depend on emotions, we're in trouble. We'll talk about that in a moment.

But the reality is, His drawing near to us means that we are to be especially responsive now in our lives, in our homes, in our private devotions, in family time, in our meeting together like we are today for weeks, as far as we know. In our prayer meetings, it'll be my conference call that we will all be directed in this week, and you'll have more information. We're still going to pray together and meet together.

So we praise God for that technology. But He is working among us, and Michael Durham and I were talking on Monday, and I know our elders feel this way. Our prayer meetings have greatly increased in quality of them over the months.

The praying has become more filled with faith, more desperate, more filled with humility, with crying out to God, transparency. And the more He gives us a spirit of prayer, the more He's going to work. Most revivals in church history, it was praying that God used.

He started the spirit of prayer, and He uses that as a catalyst because He's purposing to send a season of refreshing. He's answering. Many, many of us in our prayer meetings over the recent years, many times different ones of us have prayed, Lord, work among us.

Send your spirit down among us. Come down. We've cried out to Him to do this, and suddenly He did it in answer to prayer in His great purpose.

And when there is continual asking in prayer, He will answer, and He did a week ago. But now how do we respond? What lessons are we to take away from last Sunday and apply? Because there are things we're to do now individually and as a church. There are increased responsibilities that we've always had as far as our responsibility to respond, but there are increased ways we are now to respond.

Each one of us are to respond in a more heightened way, in a more expectant way. All of us together as a church are to see this, that when God draws near to us, we are especially to engage ourselves to be

drawing near to Him because He is drawing near to us. We should heighten, increase, and double down on our seeking of the Lord right now.

Become more tenacious, more zealous, more resolute in our response because He let us taste something last week that is Him working. Some of us have never experienced that before. Some have, but when He's working, we've got to press in.

I want us to think briefly about how we must be in order to respond rightly now to the Lord freshly working among us. What are we to do now? Six truths that are simple and specific and practical. I want you to note them.

If you can write them down, do it. But these are practical things we're to do in responding to God's manifest presence. I'm going to be brief, specific, and practical, but if we all, brothers and sisters, if we all take these truths to heart, we could see, we could very possibly see, not just a one-day mercy draw, we could see God beginning a season of refreshing.

So, here's six truths today to apply to us. Number one, the work and responsibility of repentance is ours to do immediately always. The work and responsibility of repentance is ours to do immediately.

We must not wait for an emotional experience before we repent. Someday, because God's presence was real, various people repented both without publicly praying or confessing and several by praying and confessing, repented of spiritual lethargy, spiritual backsliding, spiritual declension. God's presence and the emotions of it, and rightly so, produced repentance in the heart.

The heightened conviction produced that. And that's wonderful. Absolutely right to do.

But we've got to learn that when God speaks, when there's a movement of the spirit or not, when there's emotions or not, when God shows us something in a service or in our lives, our responsibility to repent is then and there and now. Immediate repentance is essential to cultivate a lifestyle and an atmosphere in our lives of the presence of God coming in our services. Whenever God speaks to a sermon, whenever he convicts us, we should then and there in our hearts repent.

We don't have to have an emotional experience of a manifest outpouring to repent when God puts his finger on something. Any service, when God speaks to us and deals with us and nails us, we ought to, in that service, repent. Whether you share it, stand up and share it, or whether you ask for prayer, brethren, we've got to make our repentance our immediate response to what God shows in our hearts.

He shows us the sin of omission. He shows us the sin of commission. He shows us neglect.

He shows us the weak, cold state of our heart. We need to stop right then. As Michael said in his sermon, we need to discern good and evil.

We need to recognize and know ourselves. And right then, we have to cultivate an attitude of prompt repentance in every service, in the moment, in our private times of prayer, with our marriages, in our relationships. We must cultivate our responsibility of repentance.

Now, brothers and sisters, we can walk in this. And Sunday was a precursor and a wake-up call to us taking serious personal repentance immediately and not putting it off, not quenching it, not neglecting it, not postponing it. Some of you who responded publicly last Sunday would have been miserable if you had

quenched the spirit and had gone home and hadn't immediately repented.

Some of us may have quenched the spirit and we should have prayed or confessed and we gave in to fear and we quenched the spirit. The spirit of God will be quenched if we cut short walking in immediate repentance as individual Christians and as a church. That's truth number one.

The work and responsibility of repentance is ours to do immediately. Truth number two. It's connected.

Obey the Holy Spirit immediately and fully. Obey the Holy Spirit immediately and fully. Now this becomes a little more complex because you don't always discern.

You don't know if what you're feeling is the spirit guiding you or if it's your emotions or if it's your prideful flesh wanting to say something to appear spiritual. So we have to be humble. We have to be prayerful.

But still it's true. The spirit of God ministers to us. He convicts.

He comforts. He stirs. He quickens us as last Sunday to stand and pray.

Those who did that knew they had to do it. They knew they were being led of God and they stepped out in faith and humility and did it. Those who stood up to confess knew they had to do it and they knew that God was guiding them too.

We all need this, brothers and sisters. When you know it's His will in a service, in a prayer meeting, to share, to pray, do it. Don't quench the spirit.

Now it's got to be in the spirit because if it's in the flesh, if it's carnal, everybody will know it. And because it can't be about you, it's got to be about the glory of Christ and what He's doing in the midst of His people. When you know it's God's will for you to obey the spirit's promptings, you need to do it more.

Our church is not spontaneous enough. We are often too quiet. People are afraid to praise God out loud.

People are afraid to do that. Sunday there could have been some loud shouts of joy, but there was only the soberness, the quietness, the conviction, and the tears. And maybe Sunday that was what was fitting, but it wouldn't have been out of place.

If anybody felt great joy and wanted to praise God, they should have done it with great joy. We don't do that enough because we're not free enough. Brethren, we've got to be truly free in the spirit.

We don't respond this quickly just because our emotions drive us to do something because someone else did. No. We've got to be more discerning about that.

But we must always, each one of us, must respond to God's truth in His immediate presence. And any of you brothers, if God wants you to say a word between the psalms or spontaneously lead out in prayer, or as the dear sisters did last Sunday, they cried out to God fervently. When you know God is giving you something for the church, for the meeting, do not quench it.

But brethren, don't be afraid. You're in a loving family atmosphere, and we must grow in this. So we must give opportunity for spontaneous obedience to the Holy Spirit, whether the emotions are there or whether they're not.

Think of Acts 2 and the outpouring of the Spirit. In the sermon, the people interrupted Peter and cried out, what should we do? They responded. They couldn't hold it back.

And they interrupted Peter's sermon, and he was glad. He started giving them exhortations. So they responded.

They spoke up about their need. They cried out, and they repented. Brothers and sisters, we must individually cultivate true spontaneity in our obedience, in our times of worship, and in our church life.

Stop being quiet when God's giving you something to contribute. Don't be afraid. When you know it's God leading you, you should obey.

When you know you're being led, and you often will know that because peace will come with it, a compulsion of the Spirit in your mind where you feel this urgency, you've got to speak it because you know it'll be in a frame. When you know you're led, act and speak. Look for an opportunity, and don't be afraid.

It was such a blessing when that spontaneous time of prayer started after Brother Lee sat down. And I think it was one of the sisters who had the courage and the passion and longing to stand and cry out to God. She led the way.

On my women's service, I will pour out my Spirit, says the Lord. Men's service, women's service. So let us not quench the Spirit.

Have you been quenching the Spirit in our services? Did you last Sunday? I don't know that anyone did. But it's a good question to make sure. Every one of us need to know, in a service, what does God want of me? So that's truth number two.

Obey the Holy Spirit immediately and fully. Truth number three is connected to this. Do not wait for some special feeling or experience or phenomenon to respond to God's presence.

Phenomenon means an occurrence, something happening. Somebody breaks down and they cry out. For you, that's a phenomenon that happened in the moment.

Don't wait for that to respond to God's presence. We don't have to feel anything. We don't have to experience something.

We don't have to have a phenomenon happening around us to respond to God's presence. Many of us, like all Christians widely, are different emotionally in our personality. Some feel very little emotion.

Some rarely cry. Others can be weeping and are very emotional, and it flows out. That's human personality.

It's not necessarily a sign of the moving of the Spirit. So we all have to be ourselves. And if you're an unemotional person, don't think that God's presence wasn't ministering to you because you didn't feel or pray like others did.

No, we don't wait for a feeling or an experience or some phenomenon to respond to God's presence. Emotions are needed, and they're important, but they may be a sign of the Spirit's moving. They may not be a sign of the Spirit's moving.

Some people can get very emotional, and emotionalism takes over. And so we must see these things rightly. Truth number four.

Exercise faith yourself in relation to God's presence. Exercise faith. That means you individually and I, and as a church corporately, we need to believe God.

We need to believe Him. We have believed Him when we've been praying and crying out, and then He answers. That's an answer to the faith of God's people.

Faith God rewards. Faith He responds to. It was a couple of weeks ago at the Denton prayer meeting.

I think that's where I was. And I shared out of Matthew 7 on that verse. If you being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to them that are asking? That was our message that night.

And then the parallel, of course, is Luke 11, 13. And the word change is Matthew says good things. Luke says the Holy Spirit.

But the fact is, brethren, we've been asking God to do this. We have been exercising faith. Faith is a duty.

Faith is command. Faith lays hold of the promises of God and believes them and pleads them and sucks out of them all the grace that God has promised in those promises. And it's not coincidental that when the disciples saw Jesus curse the fig tree, they came back the next day as withered.

They were astounded. Remember his response? He put on him, have faith in God. You have this kind of faith.

You believe God for mountains to be moved. You believe Him to pour out His presence. You believe Him to do the impossible.

We are to exercise faith right now. Why? Because we saw God come last Sunday. And that is, it's God saying, here I am.

I've been drawing near. I've been hearing you. Here I am.

And we keep asking. And we keep exercising faith. We should pray daily for more of the Spirit now on our lives and on our church.

Jesus said, according to your faith, be it unto you. Another place Jesus asked a sick person, do you believe that I'm able to do this? Now, brothers and sisters, today, do we believe God is able to continue to pour out His Spirit? He's asking us the question. Do you believe I'm able to do this? Another place Jesus said, here in John, did I not tell you that if you would believe, you would see the glory of God? We don't have to see the glory of God before believing, but we saw the glory of God in a mercy drop last Sunday when He drew near.

We did see, so now will we believe? Will we continue to believe? Faith is the action of the heart that lays hold of God and its promises. Truth number five, we must welcome and cultivate God's manifest presence. Would you give me that Bible over here, please? I need a passage of Scripture, and I didn't have it here with me.

I want you all to turn to Exodus 2 and see something that's quite amazing. It is a tremendous example of welcoming and cultivating God's manifest presence. Now, this experience in Exodus 2 was unique historically, but the spiritual principles of it are phenomenal.

Exodus 2. I think that's the wrong chapter. Sorry about that. Chapter 3, Exodus 3. Let's just read the first four verses and look at the lessons here about cultivating God's manifest presence.

Now, Moses was sending a flock of Jethro's father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the back of the desert and came to hoard the mountain of God. All right, pause. Here, Moses is alone in his regular responsibilities of living and working, and he's alone in the desert.

So it wasn't a big meeting. It wasn't a conference. There was nothing outstanding or significant going on.

But look at verse 2. Suddenly, that's my word. That's not in the text. And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of the bush.

So here's a phenomenon. Here's suddenly God coming and doing something supernatural. He did it last Sunday at our church.

Not this, but the same reality. God came suddenly. Here, God comes to Moses suddenly and appears in a flame of fire from the midst of the bush.

It was God's presence that Moses was fixing to experience. And it was God's presence we experienced last Lord's day. And look at verse 2. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed.

Then Moses said, I will now turn aside and see this great sight. He's cultivating. He's choosing to respond.

He didn't run. It wasn't business as usual. He stopped.

And his holy curiosity into the verse to see why the bush does not burn. Moses drew aside. He realized this was a special moment.

And he's cultivating. He's seizing the moment to cultivate what God's doing. Then Moses said, I will now turn aside and see this great sight.

And notice verse 4. When the Lord saw that he turned aside and looked, God called him. God saw Moses responding. He saw Moses drawing near.

And then God spoke to him. Is the Lord looking at Providence Chapel now and saying, are they not going to leave seven days ago without drawing aside, cultivating my presence, responding now? That's when God spoke to him. And the rest is history.

God revealed himself more to Moses in that moment because he drew aside. Psalm 27, 8 says this. I love this verse.

Psalm 27, 8 says this. When you said, seek my face, my heart said to you, your face for it I'll see. God speaks about seeking him and David said, when you said that, Lord, my heart was going to respond.

My heart said, yes, I'm going to seek your face, Lord. So there's spiritual response, cultivating a response. We need to be more and more open to the spirit of God moving on.

We need to come to our worship services now in our homes and then later with expectancy, with having prayed for the spirit upon the preaching, upon our families, upon our hearts, upon our praying together on Wednesdays. We need to cultivate and seek the continued moving on the presence of God. Finally, think about this tremendous promise.

Acts 2, 39. After, at the end of Peter's sermon, he says, For the promise, that's the promise of the spirit, for the promises unto you and your children and to all that are far off, that's us, to all that are far off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. Brethren, pray daily, earnestly, in faith, perpetually, be always asking.

Luke 11, 13. If you, being evil, being fallen, finite, limited, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who are asking? Beloved, those truths, we can all increase in. We can walk in those.

And that is cultivating God's presence. That is learning the lessons and applying the visitation of the Spirit. So may God give us much grace to that end.

A season of refreshing from the presence of the Lord. Let's pray. Oh Lord, apply this to our hearts.

We welcome you. We ask you to continue to work. We ask you to help us to walk in the truth, in the Spirit, in joy, in faith, as we seek the Lord Jesus Christ, the great Giver of the Spirit from Heaven's throne room.

For the Revelation says that the Lamb is the dispenser of the Spirit of God. And we pray, oh Lord Jesus, that you'd rain down upon us. Work in us to well and to do of your good pleasure.

Lord, let nothing about our church or in our church hinder. Lord, you could spread your manifest presence throughout Denton. Lord, you can begin to move widely in conviction and desperation in our nation at such a critical time as this, as our nation and the world is experiencing what it is.

So Lord, have mercy upon us. Blessed be your name. And now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace always and every way.

The Lord be with you all. Amen.

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