

Manifest Presence - Part 4

by Richard Owen Roberts

The sermon emphasizes the importance of seeking God's manifest presence through repentance, fasting and prayer, and corporate commitment, in order to experience transformation and dependence on God.

Duration: 28:37

Scripture: Genesis 18:14, Exodus 32:9-10, Exodus 33:14, Psalm 27:8, Matthew 6:33, James 4:8

Topics: "Gods Judgment", "Revival"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the concept of God's judgment and how it is different from utter destruction. He uses the example of Moses pleading with God not to destroy the people and instead offering a remedial judgment. The preacher emphasizes that while God has the right to destroy America, He has chosen to judge instead. He warns that evangelicalism in America has become complacent and unaware of the Lord's departure, urging the congregation to prioritize drawing near to God and reaching out to those who do not know Him.

Transcript

I have been distinguishing between God's manifest presence, his essential presence, and his cultivated presence. Now, what if this choir came to the permanent conviction that the most wonderful thing that could happen to the Wheaton Bible Church would be for God himself to come near? Now, obviously, if you think God already has, that's a rather dumb statement, and I will say also with gentleness, if you think he already has, you need to investigate your own brain power and your observation. It's evident you are not much acquainted with either scripture or history.

I have read hundreds of accounts of God's drawing near, and in the ten years or so that I've been teaching in the Wheaton Bible Church, I haven't seen happen here what I have read about happening in scripture and happening with frequency in history. So, I pose again this consideration. What if this group were to come to the permanent conviction? Now, I underline the word permanent.

Some of you may, in these weeks, think what I'm speaking about highly desirable, and you may think it would be lovely if, indeed, God did draw near, but I'm saying what if you came to the permanent conviction that this is the greatest thing that could happen to us as a church? And to this end, what if you were to do everything that would be appropriate to do? Now, no one can force God's hand. We well understand that. I'm sure all of us accept the fact that God does just what he pleases, and we can't please to force God to come near and force him.

He only comes near if he pleases, but what, nonetheless, if we were to do everything that is appropriate to be done in terms of drawing God into our midst? First, on an individual basis, in terms of cultivating God's presence, and secondly, in terms of the corporate group seeking his manifest presence. Well, you say, what sort of things could someone do? Well, first off, if one is to speak about what might be done, they must speak about repentance, because it is crystal clear, if you go through Scripture on this subject, that the lack of repentance is the thing that drives God from a person or a people. Have you read the account of Samson recently? Judges 13 to 16.

Maybe you remember the story. His, well, before he was born, his mother was barren, and an angel of the Lord, now, not just an angel, but the angel of the Lord, appeared to the mother and indicated to her that she was to have a son, and gave specific instructions concerning the son, all of which were summarized in the statement he was to be a Nazarene or a Nazirite from birth. The father was not present when the angel of the Lord appeared, and after speaking with his wife, you remember, he was very desirous that the angel would reappear and reconfirm what was said.

And in his grace, God heard the prayer of Manoah, and the angel of the Lord reappeared. I emphasize the angel of the Lord. When you study such accounts where the angel of the Lord appears, it is perfectly evident that it is not some angel like Gabriel or Michael.

There's really no denying the fact that it is the Lord himself who appears. These pre-incarnate appearances of Christ himself. And again, when the angel of the Lord appears the second time, the message is the same.

Your wife is to do precisely what she has been already told in connection with this child. The child is born, and in three or four cases where some detail is given concerning some event in Samson's life, the particular account is brought to its conclusion in the statement, and the Spirit of the Lord came upon him mightily. But what we remember most about Samson is the end.

During the period in which he engaged his affections with Delilah, and the most striking statement of all in connection with Samson is he roused himself as before, but he didn't know the Lord had left him. May I say concerning evangelicalism in America that it has aroused itself as before, and it doesn't know that the Lord has left. That is a conviction that I have so deeply that a thousand persons shouting at me could not in any way cause me to waver.

I am convinced we know almost nothing of God's presence. Now, why did God leave Samson? Well, obviously he left him because he not only sinned, but he continued, he dolted in it, he toyed with it, he enjoyed it. I would not want for a moment to suggest that a person who falls into sin and then repents is a person from whom the Lord automatically withdraws.

That's certainly not the teaching of Scripture, but one who falls into sin and rolls in it, stays in it, enjoys it. Now, that's another matter. So, if we're speaking in terms of what it might take for God to come near again, we're speaking about the urgent necessity of personal repentance.

And as I indicated, I think, last week, repentance not merely of the fruits of sin, but repentance at the very roots. As in David's case, I indicated to you that the prophet confronted him and charged him with four great faults in terms of God. And his adultery and his murder grew out of the root sin of having allowed a low view of God to enter his life.

And may I say to you that anyone here who supposes that we have now as much of the manifest presence of God as the church has ever known has tolerated in themselves a very low view of God. Nothing but the low view of God would permit any professed Christian to be content with a level of things as they exist today. And I'm speaking not merely of repentance of murder and of adultery, but repentance of the root sins of pride and of unbelief, of the elevation of self above God.

Then, naturally, when one speaks about repentance as a factor in terms of God's drawing near, they must go beyond speaking of personal repentance and enter into a realm upon which the church is almost entirely silent, and that is the realm of corporate repentance. When was the last time you heard a strong word on the subject of corporate repentance? Just as individuals sin, so choirs can sin, and whole churches can sin, and entire denominations can sin. Lest you think I'm pointing the finger of accusation at you, may I suggest to you that the Southern Baptist denomination reports 14.6 million members, but four million of those they have no address for and do not know whether they're dead or alive.

Now, there's a corporate sin involved there. If they knocked four million right off the top of their statistics, they would be in danger of no longer being America's largest Protestant body. So, for reasons like that, you see, they go on padding statistics and lying.

Some of the denominational officials have told me quietly that in truth they have closer to six million than 14.5. Now, there's a corporate sin, I'm saying, when numbers are inflated and padded and when this sort of a thing is done. You could have the matter of a corporate sin in a situation where a person is known to have fallen into some, let us say, sin of the flesh, and the whole group is aware of it, but the group has done nothing about it. The silence of a group, in other words, is the same as putting a seal of approval upon a wrong deed.

The fact that the church rarely ever practices discipline means that the whole corporate body has become guilty. So, I'm saying if we're going to concern ourselves, if this choir is to say on a permanent basis nothing, absolutely nothing, is more desirable than that God should draw near, then this group must concern itself with individual repentance and with corporate repentance. And that's not always easy.

It's much harder to probe into the lives of others than it is to be quiet. We somehow think that part of godliness is keeping our nose out of other people's business. But the church is a corporate body, and even if it's just the thumb that's sore, the whole body must rally to the welfare of the sore thumb, corporate repentance.

Another tremendously crucial matter in terms of God's drawing near, if you really go into this matter biblically, you will get some sense of how important it is, fasting and prayer. Now, these days the church pays almost no attention to fasting. That is said to be an Old Testament matter.

And yet, many of us recognize that although Jesus did not speak at great length on the subject, he did say, and when you fast, and then he gave some instruction concerning conduct and appearance, he took it for granted his people would fast. But there's almost no fasting going on, but always in history you'll find that there is a relationship between fasting and prayer and God drawing near. And fasting and prayer, to the degree that a special name in Scripture is assigned to this matter, you will find in the book of 2nd Chronicles that there are at least five seasons in which God chooses to draw very near to the people.

And in each of these instances, fasting and prayer precedes God's drawing near, and the matter of a solemn assembly. Now, that isn't even a term that most of us are acquainted with, I dare say, and yet it is

a very prominent term in Scripture, and extraordinarily prominent in the history of America. You could not read very much in terms of American church history without running in time after time to this whole matter of the solemn assembly, days in which the corporate body laid aside everything and sought the face of God in fasting, in prayer, and in corporate repentance.

I'm saying to you, what if this choir were to begin to believe permanently that the presence of God in a manifest way was the most significant thing that could happen to the church? And what if you were to do whatever, whatever God called for to ensure that human, at least, God could draw near? I wonder if you've ever stopped to think what it might be like if God drew near. Now, sometimes you sing so beautifully that almost without thinking the congregation claps, and I'm not depreciating that, but let me tell you something more wonderful. When your music is so empowered by the Holy Spirit, when your gifts are so overwhelmed by divine grace, that an absolute hush falls.

When not a soul moves, when even the next point of the program is laid aside and silence prevails. Have you ever been in a situation where God was so obviously present that not a person moved? Well, I have infrequently. I'm thinking now of a situation that occurred perhaps two or three years ago where I was speaking in a morning meeting and had liberty, plenty of time, no clock to worry about.

Perhaps I spoke an hour and a half, something like that, and I sat down. There was total silence. No one moved.

No one said a word. It was a program, but nobody paid any attention. God was present.

Then after some time, I don't know how long, but I'm going to guess maybe 15 minutes of total silence, somebody, a charismatic, frankly, couldn't stand the silence any longer and made some usual noise. Then things just began to go in the normal direction. Then the pastor of this church, it happened to be a Lutheran Church, the pastor of the church came forward.

He said, in all my life, I've never been in a situation where God was so obviously manifest. One of the strongest rebukes I've ever heard given, and a silence fell again. I suppose it was maybe 10.30 or quarter to 11 by that time.

I had another meeting in another state, and someone picked me up at 12.30 to drive me to this next engagement. But when I left at 12.30, the largest portion of the congregation sat in absolute silence and some on the floor. I want to say to you, dear friends, there is nothing, nothing to be compared with God coming near.

What if you made it the greatest concern of your lives and your ministry as a choir to do anything and everything that God would desire in order that he might draw near. Do I need to remind you that there are persons who attend this church that don't know the Lord? And others who attend this church that are badly backslidden? Some who are dabbling in the worst kinds of sins. And some who come and go week after week after week, and they have not known perhaps for years any kind of spiritual conviction.

Some of you have perhaps family who fit the description I've just given. Persons that you're burdened about who need the Lord. You know as well as I do that very few people know true conviction these days.

I have talked with persons involved in the most horrendous sins and have had them say to me, well in my case God understands, and he makes an exception. And they honestly feel that what they're doing is all right, that God understands. They have more ways of rationalizing and justifying.

But but I'm saying to you, what if God were to so touch this choir and to so use you that he himself descended upon the congregation while you sang. There would not only be the silence of which I've spoken. But have you ever been in a meeting when suddenly people just burst into tears? When the conviction is so heavy.

Now I'm not talking about somebody pounding on the pulpit making a lot of to-do. I'm talking about God being so present in a situation that conviction prevails. And persons who have been in deep rooted sin can no longer live that way.

So that confession and restitution begin to occur on a large scale. Do you believe me when I say to you that the choir has an immense role in this whole matter? I speak from my heart when I say to you under God this choir could be the means of God drawing near. And provoking in this congregation a higher level of worship and a deeper level of repentance than the church has ever known.

No, a passing interest in this will not have any particular effect. That is why I have chosen to say to you repeatedly, what if you were to gain a permanent concern? And what if this permanent concern were so deep and so large and so powerful that you could not and you would not escape it? And you were to say to yourself as an individual and corporately you were to say to one another we will not let God go until he blesses us this way. I wonder how many of you are thoughtfully acquainted with the passage in Exodus 32.

You may want to join me as I point out two or three things in connection with this very very powerful passage. Exodus 32. This passage begins with the account of the children of Israel during Moses absence waiting on Aaron with their complaints because Moses is gone and as far as they know God is gone also and Aaron is immediately ready with a solution and he tells the people to strip off their earrings and to bring him their gold and he fashions the golden cap.

Now that is familiar territory, I suppose. But to look now at Exodus 32 at verse 7 the Lord spoke to Moses. He said go down at once for your people whom you brought up from the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves.

They have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them. They have made for themselves a molten calf and have worshipped it and have sacrificed to it and said this is your God O Israel who brought you up from the land of Egypt and the Lord said to Moses I have seen this people and behold they are an obstinate people. Now then let me alone that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them.

I will make of you a great nation. Now let me ask you to observe that God always deals with sin and he always deals with it as it occurs. Some of us are in grave danger in thinking in terms of judgments that are all down the road somewhere and thinking if we persist in sin God may eventually judge us, but I don't know anything about a God who eventually judges.

The only God I know is always current in his judgments. Now the judges of our land are usually behind, but God is never behind. Last week we thought to a little of David and I can simply remind you that God judged David the day he sinned.

There are two basic kinds of judgment in Scripture and now I'm not speaking of eschatological or future judgments. There are two basic kinds of current up-to-date judgments. Judgments that may be called final

and judgments that may be called remedial.

I spoke last week of a remedial judgment. God judged David by withdrawing from him. Now in this passage we have just noted God says to Moses, Moses you stand aside.

I'm going to go down there and I'll utterly destroy those people and I will raise up out of you Moses a nation for myself. Now that is a final judgment. God is saying I will destroy every last one of them.

Now certainly God has the right to destroy America. If God destroyed America today, it would be an act of justice. Nobody could accuse him of being unfair or impatient or anything of the kind.

We deserve to die. But God has not chosen to destroy us. But we would be very foolish if we think God hasn't chosen to judge us.

In this passage, had we a lot of time to read it all, you could see that Moses intervenes. God says get out of the way, I'll utterly destroy the people and Moses prays and pleads with God not to do so. God does not utterly destroy all of the people.

Instead God does something else. He says to Moses, you go on now, get this people moving, rise up, get them out of here, head for the place that I have sent you and I will send my angel before you. But Moses says if an angel goes before us, I'm not going.

Because if you're not going with us, I'm not going anywhere. Now some people are contented to be guided by angels, but when you've known what it means to be led by the Lord, an angel is a mighty poor substitute. So Moses again intervenes, he pleads.

So you see a final judgment, the destruction of everyone is altered and God says instead of a final judgment, I'll give you a remedial judgment. I won't go with you myself. He gives a reason.

He says you are a stiff-necked people. If I go with you, I will destroy you. So I'll send an angel.

But Moses again prays, but he does something else. If you were to read the account, you would see he takes the tabernacle, he uproots it from in the midst of the camp, he sets it outside the camp and he appeals to the people to go outside the camp and to seek the face of God in forgiveness and in repentance. And God ends up saying in this account, all right Moses, you say you won't go anywhere unless I go with you.

I'll go with you. Now what if this choir were to come to that kind of a conviction? God could righteously destroy us, but instead God has in kindness decided not to let us know anything of his real manifest presence because he is displeased with where we're at and what we're like. But we're not going to let it go at that.

What if this choir were to join Moses in saying, Lord, we won't go anywhere if you don't go with us. And what if it became the permanent commitment of this group to so seek God that he came among you and among all of us in the sanctuary. I commend it to you as needed and as desirable.

Lord, may we know your help in dealing faithfully and permanently with the truth you bring us through Jesus Christ. Amen.

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