

Overwhelmed by the Presence of God

by Zac Poonen

This sermon reflects on the life of John, who walked with God for 65 years without backsliding due to persecution, highlighting the importance of being overwhelmed by God's presence rather than just theological accuracy. It emphasizes the need to crucify self-will daily to dwell in the most holy place, where God's presence is felt. The focus is on seeking humility, being like babes in spirit, and worshiping God in spirit and truth, rather than relying solely on intellectual knowledge or theological correctness.

Scripture: Revelation 19:10, Matthew 11:25, Hebrews 10:19, John 4:23, Zephaniah 2:3, Acts 2:25, Acts 4:13

Topics: "God's Presence", "Humility in Worship"

Description

This sermon reflects on the life of John, who walked with God for 65 years without backsliding due to persecution, highlighting the importance of being overwhelmed by God's presence rather than just theological accuracy. It emphasizes the need to crucify self-will daily to dwell in the most holy place, where God's presence is felt. The focus is on seeking humility, being like babes in spirit, and worshiping God in spirit and truth, rather than relying solely on intellectual knowledge or theological correctness.

Transcript

I was reading today from Revelation and chapter 19 and verse 10. You know, John was about, as far as we know, about 95 years old and walked with God, I believe, a spirit-filled life for 65 years, way ahead of any of us spiritually, consistently. And I think he did it without backsliding, mainly because there was such a lot of persecution.

It's very difficult to backslide when you're persecuted. We backslide when life is comfortable and easy, when we have plenty of money. But when you, like those early apostles, when they lived almost from hand to mouth and struggling and persecuted wherever they went, it's difficult to backslide.

So I believe they lived a very consistent life with God, seeking Him. They were driven to God all the time, 65 years of walking with God. And then this wonderful revelation that he got, all these first 18 chapters.

And at the end of it, it says here in verse 10 of Revelation chapter 19, that I fell at the feet of this angel. This was an angel that had explained all these things to John. And it says, I fell at his feet to worship him.

When he said to me, don't do that. I'm a fellow servant of yours, your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus. Worship God for the testimony of Jesus, the spirit of prophecy.

Now, we know theologically, it's not right to worship anyone other than God himself, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. How is it that John didn't know that? Was he behind us spiritually? He was way ahead of us. And particularly, he was almost talking with God face to face in the book of Revelation.

What I learned from that is, you can be theologically accurate and not make the mistake that John made. Never worship an angel. And yet, you may not know God like John did.

We can glory in theological accuracy. No, I don't do those things. I don't believe in infant baptism.

That's all wrong. I don't believe in fake tongues, and I don't believe this, and I don't worship angels. And yet, the sense of the presence of God may not be in our life as it was with John.

The greatest thing in the Christian life is not theological accuracy, that we never make a mistake, that we never do anything wrong, and that even after we are corrected, if you are corrected once, then, of course, we never do wrong. You know, we're told that we understand that. I've been corrected once on that.

I'll never do that again. We're quite proud, you know, to say that or think like that. But I see that just a few minutes later, after the angel told him, don't worship me, only worship God.

And I don't know how much longer it took for him to see all that he saw in chapter 20 and chapter 21, half an hour, maximum one hour. And then at the end of that one hour, after seeing all that he saw in chapter 20 and 21, we see in chapter 22, I heard these things. Chapter 22, verse 8, John says, and I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed me these things.

Boy, I said, John, did you forget what you heard one hour ago? Haven't you got your theology right? Yeah, we who have got all our doctrines right, and we're so quick to correct others, who may know God far more than us. Jesus said in John 17, three, eternal life is to know God. And Jesus Christ to me has sent.

It's not theological accuracy. And John knew God. He can say that, okay, he made a mistake.

Terrible sin to worship a created being. Is there anything greater sin than that, to worship a created being? And again, to be corrected, don't do that. I'm a fellow servant of yours.

You know, I feel that part of the problem we can have when we are educated, like most of us are, is that we think we can know God better. Because we read scripture, and there are people who read, go back to the Greek and the Hebrew and all that, and get all our doctrines right, and compare scripture with scripture, and everything is very clear in our mind. But revelation is another thing altogether.

You know, one of the verses I often quote is Matthew chapter 11, and verse 25. God has hidden his greatest truths from clever, intelligent people, and revealed them to babies. And you heard me say that the one thing that babies have, all babies, which clever, intelligent people don't have, is humility.

It's very rare, very, very rare. I mean, I'm telling you from 61 years of experience as a believer, it's very rare to find a clever, intelligent person who's got humility. There are, but genuine humility is very rare.

I'm not saying if you're poor and stupid, you got humility, because I've seen equal number of poor, foolish people who are also proud. Many uneducated people are very proud, and educated people, of course, as well. But it's not just that the Father is hidden here, but what I say here is that Jesus said in Matthew 11, 25, I praise you, Father.

Jesus was excited about it. Oh, Father, I just praise you that these wonderful truths are hidden from these clever, intelligent people. And you've chosen to reveal it to those who are genuinely humble.

And it's not just a statement of fact. It's something Jesus was excited about. And if I have the Spirit of Christ, I will also be equally excited.

God has chosen the poor of the world, it says in James 2, 5, rich in faith. One of the blessings we have had in India, in our churches, is that, I would say, if I take all of the churches we have in India, and we come together at conference time, and of course, I visit a number of these villages, is that we come in touch with people some very uneducated people. Some have never finished school.

Some are not even, of course, some sisters sometimes, older sisters, not even, can't even read and write. And we've met people like that, who can't read. I know one brother who couldn't read, and the only way he could listen to scripture was because somebody was kind enough to put the scripture onto his phone, so he could scripture.

He couldn't read or write. And I praise the Lord for fellowship with such people. I also fellowship with some wonderful educated people who are humble as well.

But the point is, the thing that I see in John, was it was not a question of what is theologically accurate. He was so overwhelmed with the presence of God in the whole book of Revelation. It was in the presence of God that he forgot so many other things, and he just got excited and fell down at the feet of an angel.

And I've asked myself, would I ever do that? Or I'm always very careful to make sure that I just do the right thing here and the right thing there. I'm not overwhelmed with the presence of God. One of the great privileges we have in the New Covenant, it's not just victory over sin.

To me, that's a byproduct, victory over sin. The main thing about Jesus' life was what Peter said on the Day of Pentecost. When he was talking about Jesus, he said, Acts 2 chapter 224, God raised him from the dead.

And David says of Christ, I saw the Lord, that means I saw the Father always in my presence. That is the greatest thing about Jesus, Acts 225. He always saw the Father in his presence.

And that's what saved him from sin. And that's what kept him always humble. And he could tell people, learn from me for I'm gentle and humble in heart.

This is eternal life, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. One of the first things that the Lord did for me when I got converted was to show me that the important thing in my life was to look unto Jesus. Looking unto Jesus to run the race in Hebrews 12 became one of my favorite verses right from the beginning.

And so from that time in these 61 years, I sought to study the life of Jesus and still do it even today. And I see more and more of how did he live? And I see here, he was always overwhelmed with the presence of his Father. And that's what he sought to communicate to his disciples.

And it was very difficult for all the educated scholarly Pharisees who could explain the doctrines very clearly to understand that. But simple-hearted people like those fishermen, there were educated people among them. I think Matthew, if he was a tax auditor, he must have been whatever was the equivalent of

being an economics graduate in those days.

There were people like that. But they all came to the place of brokenness and humility, especially after they were filled with the Spirit on the day of Pentecost. And I see one of the great blessings of the New Covenant, which is spoken of in the book of Hebrews, is that we can enter into the most holy place.

And that picture of the Old Testament tabernacle, where the Israelites could not go past that veil. They could come to the outer court, where the sacrifice for sin and the basin of water, which symbolized water baptism, the cross and water baptism. And then they could go into the holy place, which speaks of a Spirit-baptized life.

For some people, that's it. We are baptized in the Holy Spirit. To me, that is just the holy place, the second part of the tabernacle.

Because that's where you serve God. You know, you offer up the incense and the the seven-fold lamp burning there is a picture of anointed life. So the first section is those who have accepted Christ and been cleansed in the blood.

And then you go to the second part of the tabernacle, which is the holy place, which is baptized in the Holy Spirit. For many people, that's the end. Or the incense, speaking of time of prayer, and the loaves of bread, speaking of the study of the Word of God, and the lamp burning, which is the spirit of witnessing.

Witnessing in the power of the Holy Spirit, praying in the Holy Spirit, reading and studying God's Word in the Holy Spirit, that's it. That's not, that's old covenant. Then there's a veil beyond which Jesus rent the veil so that we can go beyond that.

And there is not service, it's worship. Worship in the Spirit, not worship in the soul. All the worship that you find in the book of Psalms is worship in the soul.

The soul is my mind and my emotions and in the body. Raise my hands, clap my hands, get all excited and intellectually accurate expressions of worship so that we don't go theologically wrong. That's mind, emotions, and body.

Not against it. I believe it's good, but it's still old covenant. Until you get through the veil, you're not overwhelmed with the presence of God.

When you go through the veil inside the most holy place, that is where God dwelt. And that's the most important thing of the new covenant. You know, the other day I was taking a, I was having a conference with RLCF, where I spoke for a number of sessions on new covenant men who lived in the Old Testament.

And I was amazed at their knowledge of God. You know, so many things about them, they didn't have a theological understanding that we have today. But some of those very godly men who lived there, but even they could not enter into the presence of God like we can.

Moses, once in a while, would see the glory of God and be overwhelmed, and his face would radiate, but it would fade away. And Daniel also, occasionally, would be overwhelmed with the presence of God. But in Hebrews 10, turn with me to Hebrews 10, it says here, Brethren, we have boldness to enter into, this is the most holy place, it's referring to what we call the most holy place, the third part of the tabernacle, by the blood of Jesus.

And he says, the way into this most holy place, we know that what's called his holy place here is what we call is the most holy place, because of verse 20, by a new and living way, which he inaugurated for us through the veil, and through the veil means we go into the most holy place. And when Jesus died, that veil was rent, and that speaks of the flesh of Jesus. The veil symbolized the flesh of Jesus, and you've heard me say the flesh is self-will.

Jesus had a will of his own, which he always denied. John 6, 38, I came from heaven, I have a God, my father gave me a will, but I denied it consistently, never did my own will. He had his own will, but he never did, but only the will of his father.

And even in Gethsemane, when he struggled, it was with will, my will, and when that will was the consistent 33 and a half years crucifixion of self-will was what rent the veil. That veil symbolized, as it says here, self-will, man's flesh, man's strong self-will, blocking out the presence of God. Nobody can go in there.

They didn't understand the meaning of it then in the old covenant, but now it is explained the only thing, brothers and sisters, that prevents you from dwelling in God's presence all the time is your strong self-will. And you can see that strong self-will in so many of our relationships, particularly as husband and wife at home, all the conflicts that arise there, or expressions that you have, you say things to each other which you regret, it's from strong self-will, or conflicts between brothers and sisters, strong self-will. We can have all our theology right.

We may never worship angels because we know that's wrong theology. If you don't dwell in God's presence, you're not overwhelmed with the presence of God. And it's a wonderful thing to, I thought of Moses, you know, he came from the presence of God, and when he spoke, people sensed this man is being in God's presence.

And brothers, I want to share this with you, brothers and sisters, when you share God's word, I don't mean just in the meetings. In the meetings, we can be very conscious that we must say everything right, and say everything properly, and whether we know it or not, we are trying to impress people, fine. But we got to share God's word even in personal conversation with people, unprepared, no prepared messages there.

You talk to one another, talk to husband and wife, talk to brothers and sisters, sometimes on the phone, sometimes in an email. And in all of those things, we must communicate something of the presence of God through our words. That is God's will, where our life is constantly in God's presence.

It doesn't happen overnight, but we must work towards it, where we are living in the most holy place all the time, where we are more conscious of God than of people, that even when we speak in the meeting, we come to the place, it doesn't happen, that may take many years, but we must work towards that, even in the meeting, we are more conscious of God's presence than who we are talking to, dwelling in the most holy place. But that can only come if our strong self-will is crucified. And that's why Jesus said, if anyone wants to follow me, Luke 9, 23, follow him into what? To have always, I've set the Father before me all the time, as you read in Acts 2, 25.

You want to come there, you've got to take up your cross. You've got to crucify that strong self-will every single day, because that is seeking to assert itself every single day. So I believe that's what made John a godly man, that he could dwell in God's presence and have these amazing revelations, and God could call him up from earth in Revelation 4, verse 1, and say, come up here, John, I want to show you something

that I cannot show you when you're down there on the earth.

Come up here. And in everything, as I read the scriptures, I want to hear that word that the Lord speaks to my heart, saying, come up here, come up here, sit with me in the heavenlies, and you'll understand my word better. You'll understand the things that are happening around you much better.

Your life will be more calm with the calmness of heaven, and oh, after some years, it won't happen overnight, but after some years, it'll become your life, the calmness of heaven, no matter what happens around you, like Jesus could sleep in the boat, as we heard. The calmness of heaven was there in him, no matter what was happening around him. Jesus said, in John chapter 4, we heard of the woman of Samaria today, and from my brother, and one of the things that amazed me, when I contrast John chapter 3 and John chapter 4, is this.

I don't think the woman of Samaria was a highly educated college graduate. No, I don't think so. I think she was probably a very simple lady.

I don't know whether she even finished high school, whereas the person in chapter 3 is a postgraduate, Nicodemus, Bible school graduate, valedictorian, been top of the class, and postgraduate, PhD in theology. So it's a contrast to see how God, Jesus speaks to these two people. To this PhD in theology, he says, you must be born again.

He's talking to him about the ABC of the Christian life, but to this uneducated Samaritan woman, he speaks about the highest thing of all. You must learn to worship God in the spirit, John 4, 24. Now, humanly speaking, I'd say, hey, it's the other guy who should hear about these high things.

He's the PhD man. Lord, this is an uneducated person. She needs to learn how to be born again.

The Lord says, my ways are not your ways. I don't look at a man's head. I look at his heart.

I look at a woman's heart, and I see that he spoke about worship to an uneducated, five-times-divorced lady. Would you ever think of speaking about worship in the spirit to a five-times-divorced lady who's not only that, but who's now sleeping around with a man who's not even legally married to you? God's ways are not our ways. He talks to this woman about the true worshipers, verse 23, the true worshipers who worship the Father in spirit, not in soul and body like in the Psalms and in the Old Testament.

You know, as I've seen a lot of worship in churches and YouTube and so many YouTubers full of so-called Christian songs by different groups and church services, I don't see it as worship in spirit. It's praise and thanksgiving, and a lot of it, the emphasis is body and soul. It's mind and emotions, and hands, body, mind, and emotions.

That's it. If you remove body, mind, and emotions from these so-called praise, they call worship meetings a praise meeting, there's hardly anything left. There's no sense of God's presence at the end of it all, and that's why in some churches they have to have all these, what sort of lights are they called, blue, red, green lights in the stage so that people are moved by these things, and so many other gimmicks, but they've got their theology right.

They won't worship angels like John did. They're not overwhelmed with the presence of God like John was either. We can have our choice.

This woman, I'm sure she couldn't explain all the theology that Nicodemus could, but Jesus felt she must explain to him some of the profoundest words on worship that Jesus ever spoke, was spoken to this sinful Samaritan woman. God is a spirit, verse 20, John 4, 24, and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth, not just in body and mind and emotions. No, Father, I thank you.

You've hidden these things from the clever and the intelligent and revealed them to babes who can't explain even probably the difference between soul and spirit and mind and emotions like I can. See, I'm not uneducated. I'm educated, and I think I've got a certain amount of intelligence, and when I read that verse, I said, Lord, what about people like me? I mean, I come under that category of those who are, what do you say, wise and intelligent in an earthly way, and thank God you've hidden these things from the wise and intelligent.

What do people like me do who are earthly wise and intelligent? And the Lord said, well, you can be like a babe if you want to. That's a choice open to everyone. If you want to impress people with your wisdom and your intelligence, you can do that.

Or if you want to be like a babe, you can be that. You have the choice. When we speak to people personally, when we speak in the meetings, I remember in the early days of my preaching, I wanted to impress people, but I was wise and intelligent, and I don't judge anyone who does it today because that's the way I went, but I thank God I didn't remain there, and I pray that none of you will remain there who are in that spot right now.

Let's grow and pursue, like it says in the book of Zephaniah, a verse that I love in Zephaniah and chapter two and verse three, all you humble of the earth, I hope you are in that category, all you humble of the earth, Zephaniah 2, 3, seek the Lord and seek for more humility. Zephaniah 2, 3, I've never forgotten that verse. All you humble of the earth, seek the Lord for more humility.

You can never have enough. I've taken it as a word for myself for my whole life because then I know I will have revelation, even if I accidentally worship an angel sometimes. I'm overwhelmed by the presence of God.

Some of my doctrines may not be 100% accurate. I mean, I try my best to study scripture and get it right, but more important than that, I want to be overwhelmed by the presence of God, and I don't want to produce a bunch of people in the churches I preach in of theologically accurate people who cross their T's, dot their I's, never make a mistake. Their language is perfect.

It's all scriptural. They can quote a verse for every single thing. I'm not interested in that.

I'm interested in producing in our churches disciples who are overwhelmed with the presence of God, who dwell in the most holy place, and who consistently say no to their flesh every single day, put it to death, and follow Jesus, and say Acts 2, 25, I've set the Father always before me. One last verse. Acts of the Apostles.

One of those things I cut it myself. Acts 4, 13. You see, Peter and John were preaching to these scholarly Pharisees, high priests, and all that in the early part of chapter four, and when they, it says in Acts 4, 13, when these clever scholars observed the confidence of Peter and John and realized they were uneducated, untrained in the seminaries, they were amazed, and they recognized, these guys have been with Jesus.

I say, Lord, that's what I want. I don't want to be, I don't want to impress people as educated and trained and scholarly. I want people to recognize that I've been with Jesus.

Amen.

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/JnMxH0bf65s.mp4>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/zac-poonen/overwhelmed-by-the-presence-of-god/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net