

The Sense of the Presence of God

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In Matthew, the 18th chapter, verses 19 and 20, again, I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them.

And in John 14:9, these words, Philip saith unto Him, Lord, show us the Father and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, have I been so long time with you and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip. He that hath seen me hath seen the Father. And how saith thou then show us the Father. Believeest thou not that I am in the Father and the Father in Me. The words that I speak unto you, I speak not of myself, but the Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works. And then, in the eleventh chapter of 1 Corinthians, he that eateth and drinketh, unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord that we should not be condemned with the world.

Now there has been, I suppose, since Adam fled to the trees of the garden, an age-old longing to find God. Philip expressed it when he said, Lord, show us the Father. And this longing seems to be universal. Though, along with it, there is also a sin-born fear of God so that the fallen race of men is caught between fascination and fear. Fascination, I wonder if it does not root back into the Biblical doctrine of the Divine Image, that we were made in the image of God. And that which was made in the image of another, has a desire to look in on and see that Other in whose image he was made. It is the desire of the flowing river to look back into the fountain from which it came. This is the fascination, the longing to find God. But because man has sinned, he is also afraid of God, and so like Adam flees among the trees of the garden.

Now, some particularly, the Greeks, thought of God as dwelling in the local habitation. And so, they had their sacred mount, or they had their grove or rocky peak. And they thought of God as dwelling there. And they came betimes to worship God who dwelt in the mount or in the grove or on that rocky peak. And as they approached it, the thought that God was actually there, transported them. And history tells us of some of their ecstatic songs and dances as they approached the holy place as they considered it. And they brought along with them heifers with garlands of flowers around their necks as the poet says, lowing to the skies. And they're in front of that mount or grove or peak, they sacrificed reverently, these heifers. And the poets of the day wrote verse to their deities, and sang them and the people saying them. This was the effort of men

who are lost and away from God, but who are caught in the strange fascination that God exerts over the minds of men, and long to find Him and could not.

And then God brought the Truth to the world. And He swept away errors and fancies and shadows. And He showed what the Old Testament had hinted at, what it had pointed to and what it had prepared us for. That God should appear, not on a mount or in a grove, but that He should appear in the form of a man. And His name shall be called Emmanuel. And He could say, he that have seen Me hath seen the Father.

And so now, instead of there being a holy mount where they lead the lowing heifers, instead of there being a holy grove where the poets compose their hymns to the deities, God now dwells in a man, and that Man is the focal point of manifestation. As man, He is I say, that focal point of manifestation, and as God, that point may be anywhere. So, that where two or three are gathered in My name, there am I in the midst of them.

Now, this is the truth as over against all of the dim ideas that were wrought out of the darkness and confusion of unregenerate minds. That God has given us a focal point where He dwells. That God is everywhere, I think, is believed by Jew and Christian, but that there is a point of Manifestation, is believed also by Christians. And that point, that focal point of manifestation is Jesus Christ our Lord. And as God. I repeat, that point may be anywhere. He that seeks the throne of grace findeth that throne in every place. And so, He says, if you're gathered in my name, I am with you. And if ye shall ask anything in My name, I will do it.

Now, the practice of the first Christians was very simple. They met in the name of a Man who they conceived and believed to be the focal point of God's manifest presence. They met in His name. That was their mount and their grove and their bush and their mercy seat and their Sanctum Sanctorum, their holy place. That Man was all that the Greeks had looked after and wanted and all that the Jews had sought after if happily they might find Him. He was all that. And so, when they met together, they met in His name. And that Man, they said, had died to take away the separating wall of sin, and so removed the fear, but still preserved the fascination.

So those early Christians were not afraid of God. They did not bring blood, for that blood, they said, was already shed by the man who was also God and the God who was also man. And therefore, they were not afraid of God, but they still had that reverent fascination that brought them as a magnetic attraction. As by a magnetic attraction, it brought them to God. And they could not find this God by going into the mount, for He was not in the mount. They could not find Him and satisfy their desire for His presence by going into a grove somewhere, for He did not dwell in groves. They could not satisfy themselves by going into a building, because Paul plainly said, God dwelleth not in temples made by hands. But they satisfied that by coming together in His name. And wherever they came together in His name, He was there, so that their holy place was wherever a

group of Christians were. Their sacred mount was wherever Christians came up together in the name of the Lord.

And now they said, this Man is back from death. And though He died, He's dead no longer. And though He was in the grave, He's out now. And He's in full life and power forevermore. And so, they gathered to Him knowing that He was there. Not trying to persuade Him to come, but knowing that He was there, and knowing that all Deity was present. Hidden from sight, as He was hidden once in the pillar of cloud and fire that hovered over Israel. Hidden from sight, but all Deity there. He that has seen Me hath seen the Father. And they were all with one accord in one place.

And while they thus were gathered together unto Him, the focal point of the manifested Deity, suddenly, they were all filled with the Holy Ghost. And in the 13th of Acts, they ministered to the Lord and prayed, and the Spirit said, separate me, Barnabas and Saul. Remember that in gathering together, they had no other purpose. It is wrong for Christians to meet with any other purpose, than to minister to the Lord. To recognize that here is their Holy Mount. Here is their Sacred Grove. Here is their Promontory Peak sticking up against the sky where the ancient Greeks used to feign that the deities dwelt and look down. And now, this is all swept away, I repeat, and this assembly, this gathering together is the Holy Mount. This is the Holy Grove. This is the Sacred Hill, and they ministered to the Lord. It might have been hidden away somewhere for fear of the Romans or the Jews. It may have been in somebody's house. It may have been in a synagogue. It may have been in a building, rented or borrowed or bought. Wherever it was, it was not the building. For being God, He could be anywhere. But they ministered to the Lord and they prayed.

Now, I read the passage from the book of First Corinthians that says that there was trouble in the Corinthian church, because they met without recognizing that Presence, not discerning the Lord's body. I was afraid that I could be wrong on this, so I looked it up very carefully, to see whether I was right or whether this was simply speculation on my part. And I find that the Ellicott Commentary says almost the same thing, that they met without recognizing the Presence. They did not, were not required to believe that the bread and wine were God. But they were required to believe that God was present where Christians met to serve the bread and wine.

And because they did not recognize this and would not, therefore, they were in trouble. And they met together for other purposes than that of finding God at that focal point of manifestation in the person of His Son. He that eateth and drinketh unworthily eateth and drinketh damnation, judgment is the word, to himself, not discerning the presence of the Lord. Not knowing that this is the Lord's body, of which He is the Head. And he said, the result of this unworthy gathering together was that some of those Christians were weak and sickly, and some actually died. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord that we should not be condemned with the world.

Paul, in another place said that he turned a certain man who was a Christian, over to the devil for the destruction of the flesh that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. I am not of those who believe that all sickness is of the devil, but I am of those who believe that God sometimes chastens and causes His people, actually, to be sick and to die, perhaps before their time as a judgment upon them lest they should go on to be condemned with the world. And in this instance, the judgment was upon them because they were too carnal, too worldly, too social-minded, too unspiritual, to recognize that when Christians met, they ought to at least have the reverence that a Greek had when he led a heifer to the sacred grove. They ought to at least have the reverence that a Greek poet had when he lay irreverently under the trees and compose sonnets to His deity. That when they came together, they ought to have at least the reverence that a high priest of the Old Testament had when he approached the sacred holy place, and with blood, put blood upon the mercy seat. And they didn't. They came in another way. This sense of the Presence wasn't in them. And so, the purpose and meaning of the communion dimmed down.

And it was not only true there, but in other churches as set forth in Revelation one, and two and three, it really is, Revelation two and three, the letters to the seven churches. He said that their love cooled. You've left your first love. And he said that their moral lives had degenerated. And he said their doctrines had wavered, so that they suffered that woman Jezebel to teach them to commit spiritual fornication and eat things offered to idols. And he said that they had the name that they lived, but they were dead, because they recognized not the Presence and the gathering together as believers to the holy mount, the coming up to Zion's Hill, which is the Lord Jesus Christ. This had passed away from them, and this was why Christ appeared with eyes of the flame of fire and feet like unto fine brass to trample, and with a two-edged sword in his mouth to slay. Where just before the opening of those condemnatory letters, in which he praised and blamed and pleaded for them to get right, he revealed Himself as a judge and showed the two-edged sword and the feet like unto burnished brass.

And I tell you, my brethren, that there must be judgment before there can be blessing. And I pray that we may be wise enough to escape the sharp edge of that sword. I pray that we may be wise enough to avoid the frightful crushing of those trampling feet. I pray that when the eyes of the Flame of Fire look into our hearts and question why we're here, that our motive will be found pure and holy.

Now, if this church is a real church, it is a communion, not an institution. Not an institution set up merely organized and established. Anybody can organize a church--anybody. Anybody can set up a church, get a pastor, elect a board. Anybody can organize by getting a group together, voting in a constitution and getting thus established. Anybody can set up a church. And anybody can give the offices, the body can give to the officers certain authority. The offices of authority may be set up, pastors, deacons, elders, and so on. Anybody can thus organize an institution. But unless that institution is also a communion, it is not a New Testament church.

Now, a New Testament church must be, and if this church is to be a New Testament Church, it must be a company drawn together with a fascination, the magnetic fascination of the desire to see God, to feel God, to hear God, to be where God is, as the Greeks in reverence approached their sacred place. As the Jews in reverence approached their holy place, their Sanctorum.

So, a church is a company of people who have been drawn together by the age-old and ever-new desire to be where God is. A company drawn together, I say, to see and hear and feel God appearing in the Man. Not in the preacher, not in the deacon nor elder, but God appearing in that Man, back from the dead, eternally alive.

That is the Bush before which we kneel. That is the Mercy Seat to which we approach. That is the Presence. And remember that He is literally present, though not physically present. It is a mistake to imagine that He is physically present. Some people approach the communion with great awe because they think they're approaching the physical presence of God. But the Bible teaches us, not that He's physically present, but that He is literally present, and this then is the Bush. God was not physically present in the burning bush. He was not physically present between the wings of the cherubim. He was not physically present in the cloud and fire. But in all three, He was literally present.

And so, our Lord is literally present. This Man who is the focal point of divine manifestation, is here. And if we are here for any other reason, there may be two kinds of reasons that could bring us here. If the reason is humanly worldly, but not spiritual, then, we may not be judged or punished. That is, if we come to hear a man, or if we come to hear music, or if we come for social fellowship, that is a humanly worthy reason, though it is not a spiritual reason. And therefore, we may not be judged, but we will miss the glory. That is all. We will miss the glory. And if our coming together is an unworthy reason, then we had better heed Paul's warning. If there's anybody present, I don't think it's true of this fellowship. I want to be fair and say that. But if, and those times when women go to church to show their garments, they had better look out for the warning of Paul when he says, for this cause, many are weak and sickly among you and many sleep. If they're truly Christians, they will be judged severely lest they perish with the world. And if there are other reasons. If there should be those who attend a church because it affords them a group that they may exploit to sell life insurance or real estate, or books. If that's the purpose, if that's it, then, my brethren, I say that we had better look out. For those reasons are unworthy reasons. And the warning of Paul is for you and me.

So, I ask you this morning before communion, let us try to confront the Presence. Let us try to, by faith, not bring Him here. For we don't have to do that. He is here. He is here in the presence of that divine Man who is the point of manifestation. But that we might have faith to know and discern that He is here. I think "discern" is the word Paul used and discern is the word I want. Let

us have faith to discern the Presence and that this is the body of which He is the Head. And that this is a holy place after the manner of the holy place of the Old Testament temple. And let us forgive each other as God hath, for Christ's sake, forgiven us.

Will you look in your own heart and see? Is there a grudge which you hold against anyone? You say yes, there is, but that person has never repented. You must not wait to let a person repent. But you must, you must forgive, waiting for that person to repent. And then we must vow obedience before our God. We must put away this scattering of our attention, this scattering of our attention.

Last Sunday night I preached with a young man and a young woman on the back seat over on this side, near what we call the booth, who smiled at each other and passed hands back and forth all during my most serious sermon. I don't know who they were. I don't see as well as some people. That is, as far as some people, so I could only see them. I could not make out their faces. I know this happened.

Now, I'm not saying this churlishly, because I suppose there isn't an old staid deacon anywhere in the world that at some time in his life maybe didn't steal a hand over, to hold the hand of his girl or his young wife while the service went on. So, I'm not condemning too severely. I'm only saying, brethren, that those are not good reasons for going to church.

This old man who used to be pastor of the little church that met in the building next door, his name was Joseph Hogue, a sharp-tongued old Irishman. And during the sermon, he suddenly stopped and said, young man, if you want to hold that girl's hand, take her out back to the tabernacle. And I can see what he meant. If this was their reason for being in church, then they had no ancient tradition behind them at all. They were poor mavericks, poor, spiritual mavericks, unbranded and unowned and unclaimed. They had no tradition behind them. They had no Scripture behind them. They had no, they had nothing behind them or underneath them. They were simply there for another purpose, a purpose incidentally, which certainly isn't evil. But a purpose which has nothing whatsoever to do with this fascination that brings men to the holy place, and that made the man of God say, show us the Father and we'll be satisfied. And the answer was, have you been so long with me and you've not yet discovered the Father? Don't you know that I am the answer to all the longings of Greeks and Hindus and Egyptians and Persians, and Jews? Don't you know that I am the Holy Place after which they longed?

Don't you know, that they sought the Father with fascination? Don't you know you found Him? Don't you know that He's here, and that, I, the Son of the Eternal Father, that I am the Holy Place? Haven't you found that out, Philip? Well, Philip hadn't and I don't think they did until the Holy Spirit had come. But when the Holy Spirit came, they certainly knew it immediately, then. And after that, they only met in that sacred Name. My brethren, shall we not this morning try not to bring, but to have a sense of the loving nearness of the Savior instantaneously bestowed.

Now, I say this to you, that if you could have a baptism of a sense of the presence of the ancient God who made the heaven and the earth and holds the world in His hands, the Ancient of Days, Jehovah. If you could have a sense of His presence, it would change your life from this moment on as long as you live. It would be like giving a weak, tired, sick man an injection of the elixir of life. It would change you so completely. It would elevate you and purify you and deliver you from the primals of carnal flesh to a point where your life would be one, radiant fascination from this hour on. May God grant this to us. Not His presence, but a sense of His presence.

We're met here as Christians. We're met here. The Communion will be celebrated. Somebody would say, but that isn't the way they celebrated communion in my church, and I don't quite think that the way you do it is the way it was done in the New Testament.

Well, my frank answer to you is, dear brethren, I don't know. I know that the Bible tells us that we're to drink of the cup and break the bread, but it doesn't tell us how. And it's very careful not to lay down a rigid, how to do it rule. For if the Bible had laid down that rigid, how to do it rule with all the ingredients carefully present, we would have worshipped it as the Jews worshipped the old brazen serpent. But he left it to the sanctified wisdom of any local assembly that ever met.

I remember when dear old Mrs. Jefferson was still alive. That I think brother McAfee and I went out to serve her communion. She was an old Lutheran, and the sense of the presence being in the communion was strong in her mind. And when, though she was a quiet little woman, when we unwrapped what we call the elements and knelt before her, something came over that little woman that was awe-inspiring. She felt God was there. God was there.

I know of a Roman Catholic, who still lives down here, who went by this church one day when the prayer band was meeting, and heard them sing and came in and came to a service and was converted, and still lives down there. That little old woman who until recently was sending her money to missions through the church and does write to my wife occasionally, happy, joyful, Christian letters. We took communion down there to that little old lady. And she said, oh, oh, I didn't bathe this morning. She said, I should have bathed this morning if I'm going to have the communion. And she's so tired and little and old, and her poor messed up house is such a mess, that we assured her, oh, you don't have to worry about that. The Lord doesn't look on the body. The Lord looks on the heart. But imagine will you, the reverence that that little woman had, that she didn't want even to take communion without first she had done all she could do to put away any soil that might be on her.

Well, it's not the body, but it's the spirit, it's the soul. And so, here we're gathered. And I pray, I pray that this sense of a loving nearness of the Savior may be instantaneously bestowed upon some of you. And we'll do the way we know, the best way we know. There might be four or five

other possible ways. Some places, everybody comes to the front. Some places, they have one cup. Some places, they come down in sections and groups. There are different ways of doing it. Some places they sit up and sit around and there's no nothing like this physically. But that isn't important.

What is important is that a company of believers, drawn by the fascination of the person of God to the focal point where that Presence is manifested, even Jesus Christ our Lord, that we gather here. And the best we know how, that we celebrate His death, till He come. And that we say, O Sacred Head, once wounded. By sin and grief bowed down so scornfully surrounded by thorns thine only crown. O sacred Head, what glory, what bliss till now was Thine! Yet, though despised and gory, I joy to call Thee mine. If there's an irreverent thought. If there is an unforgiving thought. If there's a disobedient heart, I can only pray, God have mercy on them for they know not what they do. Shall we discern the body and acknowledge the Bush this morning.