

The Manifest Presence of God

by E.A. Johnston

The manifest presence of God is a sovereign move of grace whereby God invades a church or a community with his presence, bringing blessings and spiritual awakening.

Duration: 20:14

Scripture: Matthew 5:8, Matthew 6:33, Acts 16:30, Revelation 3:5

Topics: "Presence of God"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of having clean hands and a pure heart in order to ascend and stand in the presence of God. The key to revival, according to the speaker, lies in verse 4 of Psalm 24. The speaker shares a story about a revival in the Scottish Hebrides that started with a group of men praying for God to send a mighty outpouring of His Spirit. The sermon emphasizes the need for personal holiness and a transformed church that is on fire for God and actively witnessing to others. The speaker encourages listeners to examine their own hearts and prepare themselves for an invasion of the Spirit in revival.

Transcript

I was in a church years ago where the manifest presence of God showed up in revival. I was not the preacher but a spectator and I was privileged to see God do a deep work in a church in a season of revival blessing. How I came to be there was really an answer to prayer and a longing in my spirit to see revival.

The year was 1994. That was 18 years ago. My, how time flies.

Come to think of it, it's been 18 years since the last time I felt God's presence in revival like that. God has been silent in many churches these days, but back in the mid-90s there were some dew drops of heaven in some churches across the land in America and I saw God show up in a church in a small community in the south. You see, I had a longing to see God come in revival.

I prayed desperate prayers to see revival. In fact, I was meeting during this time with a couple of men whom I was discipling at the time and we would meet twice a week at six o'clock in the morning on Mondays and Thursdays and we would pray for an hour and a half twice a week for God to come in revival. We did this faithfully for six months.

That added up to 72 hours of laying hold of God in desperate prayer to see revival. I was praying for God to come in revival to the church where I was a member at the time, but there were things going on behind the scenes in that church that were grieving the heart of God and I was not aware of it at the time. God could not send blessings to a church that was dishonoring Him.

Listen to me, my preacher brethren, this is a warning to us all to keep short accounts with God and walk close to the heart of God lest we miss a blessing from the hand of God. God could not bless that particular church with revival because one of the staff ministers was involved in a heinous sin during this time. God was grieved over that.

This man happened to be in charge of the prayer ministry of the church and that grief got even more. Despite the desperate prayers of myself and my two friends, God could not answer our prayer, but in His providence and mercy, He moved us to another state to be a witness of Him moving revival. All I can say about it is that that particular night I saw firsthand the manifest presence of God in revival.

As soon as I sat down in the service, I felt a heavy, holy atmosphere. There was an awful solemnity in the sanctuary. No one was preaching.

No one was doing anything but sitting there and weeping. That church was melted down beneath the awful presence of God in revival and all they could do was weep and repent. I'll never forget it as long as I live.

Well, how does a church prepare itself for an invasion of the Spirit like that in revival? Scripture points the way. It all begins with the heart, the condition of our hearts before God. To see of which I speak, let us turn in our Bibles to the book of Psalms, to Psalm 24.

Allow me to read it to you. The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and they that dwell therein. For he hath founded it upon the seas and established it upon the floods, who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands and a pure heart, who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity nor sworn deceitfully, he shall receive the blessing from the Lord and righteousness from the God of his salvation.

This is the generation of them that seek him, that seek thy face, O Jacob, Selah. Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle.

Lift up your heads, O ye gates, even lift them up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory, Selah. That is revival, friends.

When the King of glory comes in, the Lord mighty in battle with the forces of darkness, who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory. The church in America today must be honest and ask herself the question, where is the King of glory? Why is he not in our midst in revival? Why is the King of glory silent and not sending a mighty spiritual awakening to this land? Where is the manifest presence of God among us? Where is the God of Elijah? Why is he withholding revival from us today? Could it be that we as a church have grieved away the manifest presence of God from among us because of our corporate sins? Do not confuse the omnipresence of God, friends, with the manifest presence of God. The omnipresence of God is the Holy Spirit in us, and the promise where two or three are gathered, I will be in the midst of them.

No, the manifest presence of God in revival is a sovereign move of grace whereby God invades a church or a community with his presence. In the Lewis revival under Duncan Campbell in 1949 to 1952, it was said that during the revival on that island in the Scottish Hebrides that God saturated the island with his presence. This is of which I speak, God coming in revival to pour out his blessings of grace, the Lord mighty in battle who takes the field.

There is a good example of the presence of the Almighty among his people in Exodus chapter 40 and verses 34 through 35. Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation because the cloud above thereon and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.

Have you ever been in a church service where you can say that, friend? That is the glory of the Lord who filled the tabernacle. When God stirs the tops of the mulberry trees with his effusions of divine grace, we know it. When God shows up in revival, he cannot be missed.

He takes the field, and all our human props are kicked out from beneath us. We are melted down by the awful presence of a holy God, the King of glory. Wouldn't you like to see him like that in our churches today? Wouldn't you like to see the wickedness in your community run for cover as God saturates it with his holy presence? Wouldn't you like to see your church get on fire for God in lies of holiness unto God and in lies of daily witness for God? Wouldn't you like to see the very life of your church transformed into a vital New Testament Christianity? That is revival, friends.

Well, let's look at the flip side of this, how we grieve the heart of God by sin and miss the blessing of his presence in revival. Look at Exodus chapter 32, where the people of God made a golden calf and worshiped it, thus angering God. Let me read you verses 32 and 33.

And the Lord said unto Moses, Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book. Therefore now go, lead the people unto the place of which I have spoken unto thee. Behold, mine angel shall go before thee.

Nevertheless, in the day when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them. God withdraws his presence from them because of their grievous sin. Matthew Henry, the Puritan Bible commentator, has this to say about that text.

Though he promises to make good his covenant with Abraham in giving them Canaan, yet he denies them the extraordinary tokens of his presence. I will send an angel before thee. You see, friends, before the Israelites sinned with the golden calf, it was the Lord himself who led them in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.

His very presence was there as a covering to keep the hot sun off their backs in the heat of the day. The desert could be scorching hot around midday, so in his mercy he shields them from the scorching heat. And the desert at night could be very cold, so God in his mercy provided them a pillar of fire to guide them and warm them with his presence.

But now, because of their grievous sin, God removes his presence from among them. Today, in America, the people of God have grieved away the presence of God among us through our pride and disobedience. That is why we are not seeing revival today.

We don't hear very many today crying out for mercy. No, sir, we have grieved the heart of God with our self-reliance. That is why the King of Glory won't come in.

Like that church where I was a member, where I logged in over 72 hours of desperate prayer for God to show up in that church and revival, but he could not because of the flagrant sin and pride of that church. That church missed a blessing of a move of his grace, and America today is missing a blessing of a move of his grace in a mighty spiritual awakening because of our multiplied sins. Well, let us search this text in Psalm 24 and then search our hearts for the answer to our dilemma, our dilemma today of the missing presence of God among us, the withdrawn presence of God from us.

Listen, friends, there is a pattern for revival found in our passage in Psalm 24. This Psalm of David is a succession of statements about God and the God of revival. It is a bold declaration about the attributes of a holy God and a statement of faith in the promise of God to pour out his blessings in his presence among his people.

There are a series of alternate questions asked. Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord, or who shall stand in his holy place? Ascending the hill is one thing. To stand in his presence is quite another.

Verse 4 gives us the answer to who shall ascend and who shall stand. He that hath clean hands and a pure heart, who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity nor sworn deceitfully. Now, listen to the promise which follows in verse 5. He shall receive the blessing from the Lord and righteousness from the God of his salvation.

In times of revival, many lost are gloriously saved and are swept into the kingdom through a mighty harvest of blessing. More good is accomplished in a true revival of religion than years of steady evangelism. So the key to revival is found in verse 4. Clean hands and a pure heart.

Clean hands signify our relationship to fellow men. Many revivals resulted when Christians confessed their sins of an unforgiving heart to one another and made restitution. So as clean hands speak of our horizontal relationship to man, a pure heart speaks of our relationship to a holy God.

This is our vertical relationship where we are to walk with God beneath a cloudless sky of intimacy with him through a life of holiness unto him. Notice the order of these two relationships, horizontal and vertical. The apostle Peter warns husbands and wives not to quarrel so your prayers be not hindered.

Jesus spoke often on this horizontal relationship with our fellow man. Leave there that gift before the altar and go that way. First be reconciled to that brother and then come and offer that gift.

Clean hands then a pure heart. Peter addresses this vertical relationship with God but as he which hath called you is holy so be ye holy. This is our vertical relationship to God, a pure heart.

One great example of historical revival which dwells on this psalm, Psalm 24, is found in the following account from the revival on the Isle of Lewis. Listen to this story friends. The revival in the Scottish Hebrides began this way.

A group of men gathered in a barn for many months. They would meet late in the evening hours and pray for revival, pray that the God of revival would be pleased to send a mighty outpouring of his spirit upon them and their land. One evening while they were gathered in the barn, a young deacon rose and read Psalm 24, our text today.

After reading it, he turned to the others and said, brethren it seems to me much humbug to be waiting and praying as we are if we ourselves are not right with God. Then lifting his hands towards heaven, he cried, oh God are my hands clean? Is my heart pure? God heard that desperate cry of the heart and honored it by shaking that island in revival. Soon there could be found in the wee hours of the morning, young people kneeling on the hillsides beneath the light of the moon crying out, what must I do to be saved? God had taken the field, the Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle, the king of glory had come on to Louis.

Oh friends, how we need the same in our desperate hour of need in our land today. Are we willing to be honest before God and ask him to search our hearts beneath the bright spotlight of the Holy Spirit to show us anything that stands between us and he? Are we willing to get right with God? Are we willing to humble ourselves and make restitution to another where necessary? Are we willing to go to that other person whom we have offended and ask their forgiveness and reconcile ourselves to them? Are we willing to lay hold of God in holy desperation and cry out to him in sacrificial nights of prayer? Are we willing to pay the price and count the cost of seeing God move in revival in our midst? God is calling the church today to return to him. This is a call to return to him.

Will we do it? Will we do it? The word of God in Malachi declares, return unto me and I will return unto you. Who makes the first move? We do. We must be like that deacon in the barn in Scotland and ask ourselves before God, are my hands clean? Is my heart pure? And then ask God for the grace of repentance to make it right with him so we can lay hold of him in bold faith and prayer and storm heaven with a holy violence expecting God to come in revival in answer to our faith and prayers.

Oh friends, the blessings we are missing through our sinful disobedience to God and our laziness in prayer to God. Get right with God, friend. Get serious with God and God will get serious with you.

How desperately we need a revival for our day. Pray that God will be pleased to send a mighty outpouring of his grace upon our churches and upon our land before it is too late. May we say with the psalmist, this is the generation of them that seek him, that seek thy face.

Lift up your heads, O ye gates, even lift them up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts. He is the King of glory, Selah.

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