

The Withdrawn Presence of God

by E.A. Johnston

The sermon emphasizes the importance of staying connected to God and the consequences of the withdrawn presence of God in a nation, church, or individual.

Duration: 26:42

Scripture: Hebrews 3:7

Topics: "Presence of God"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on the love of God as depicted in the Bible. He highlights the sad account of the Jewish people in the Old Testament who turned away from God and worshipped idols. The speaker emphasizes the consequences of forsaking God, using examples such as King Saul and the nation of Israel. He calls for a revival in true Christianity, where believers are convicted of their spiritual coldness and seek a genuine relationship with God. The sermon also addresses the need for a high view of God and the consequences of idolatry in modern society. The speaker concludes by pointing out the signs of God's withdrawn presence in America, such as increased crime, immorality, and hostility towards Christianity.

Transcript

There was an Englishman who frequently traveled to India for business purposes. He enjoyed shopping in the Indian bazaars for his little eight-year-old girl, often bringing her home a new trinket. Returning from a recent trip to India, this Englishman had purchased a jagged necklace for his little girl.

After she wore it a few days, the metal clasp broke and he took it to a local London jeweler to be fixed. The jeweler emerged from a back room with the necklace and inquired, may I ask you how much you paid for this jagged necklace? The man replied, I believe I paid 10 pounds for it, nothing more. The jeweler smiled and said, look into this magnifying glass, see the letters carved on each piece of jade? It is French lettering.

When you lay these 78 pieces of jade side by side, they form a love letter written from Napoleon to Juliet. This jade necklace is worth a fortune, well over a half a million pounds. The Bible is comprised of 66 books and they form a love letter to us.

The Bible is a story about God's love towards sinful man in reconciling the world back to him through the death of Jesus Christ. And the love of Christ was demonstrated for us by the pouring out of his blood on

an noble cross so we could escape the wrath of God through a sin substitute who died on our behalf. God gave his only begotten son that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life.

And Jesus is seated on a heavenly throne right now where he reigns in glory. He sits at the right hand of the Father and he earned that right by way of a bloody cross. I repeat, the Bible is a love letter from God to sinful man.

It speaks of the broken heart of God over sin. It is a book of letters which tell of the love of God and it is a book which declares the good news concerning the gift of God, his son, Jesus Christ. But when I look into the Old Testament it is sad to read the account of the Jewish people and observe how they turned their backs upon the God who loved them and forsook him for other gods, gods made with their own hands.

God eventually forsook Israel because of her sins. He divorced himself from them and it is sad to see God withdraw himself from a nation and a people time and time again. This is seen in scripture.

The story of King Saul is a very sad story of a man who began well but soon shifted his reliance from God to himself and ended up by saying of himself, I have played the fool. We see the sad end of King Saul where he inquires of the witch of Endor because God had departed from him. This is seen in 1 Samuel 28 and verse 6 it reads, And when Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord answered him not.

In verse 15 Saul laments, God has departed from me and answereth me no more. I have a passage of scripture which speaks of when God withdraws his presence from his people and it is found in the Song of Solomon chapter 5 and verse 6. Listen to these sad words for this is our text today. But my beloved had withdrawn himself and was gone, gone.

This withdrawn presence of God can come in the form of judgment to a nation, a religious denomination, a church, and an individual and it is the saddest chapter of nation's history when this occurs. When a nation departs from the living God through gross sins, that is when the Almighty withdraws his presence from that nation. Look at America and how she has fallen.

This nation was founded on the Bible and the God of the Bible. Our founding fathers made the church central to society and for many of them God was central in their lives. They feared a holy God and there was a fear of God in our land back then, but there is no fear of God today.

There are some terrible things which can befall a people and a nation, things like wars, plagues, and financial calamity, but the most dreadful thing to befall a people is the withdrawn presence of God. America was once a nation favored by the Almighty. She prospered from shore to shore, but America has become a whore.

She has played the harlot with the world through her multiplied sins and the heaviest judgment upon America is the withdrawn presence of God today. We have outlawed God in this land. We walked into our borders and escorted them out of our land.

We as a nation have legislated God out of our public buildings, our schoolhouses, and our government. We have set up our own idols and we worship them over the true God. Even in our churches throughout the land, we have grieved God away from our sanctuaries and have replaced Him with man-centered methodologies and worldly entertainment.

The church today in America has proven to God in the last 20 years that we can get along fine without Him, as long as we have money and manpower. Who needs Him? He was too much of a handicap anyway to reach the lost for He was a killjoy. So the church in America melted out her own golden path and we worship that idol formed by our own hands rather than serving and worshipping the one true God.

All one has to do to recognize the withdrawn presence of God in our land today is to study the increase of violent crime in our nation, the increased murder of children, the landslide of immorality which floods our homes through television and the internet, the increased number of divorces among church members, the growing number of pastors who were throwing in the towel and leaving their pulpits and droves, the rise of militant homosexuality, the rise of hostility towards Christianity, and the rise of Islam in America all point to the withdrawn presence of God in the land. I repeat, America has legislated God out of her borders. We don't want Him anymore.

Consequently, God has withheld His favor toward us and has withdrawn His presence from us. Few today are being saved in America for we are in a time of reprobation and the true gospel is seldom heard anymore. Counterfeits fill our pulpits and multitudes are deceived by wolves in sheep's clothing.

When God withdraws His favor and presence, it is a terrible thing. We can say with the lover from the song of Solomon, but my beloved had withdrawn himself and was gone. Preachers in former days in our land were careful not to grieve God away from their churches.

This is seen from a sermon in 1702 by the New Sermon, Ichabod, or a discourse showing what cause there is to fear that the glory of the Lord is departing from New England delivered in two sermons. Preachers back then feared the Almighty, but today we just pat them on the back and treat them as a pal. We have shrunken God down to our size today.

I sat and listened to a seminary trained pastor of a Baptist church say the following, when I get to heaven, I can't wait to walk up to Jesus and grab him by the hand and shake his hand for all he has done for me. I guess this pastor was not familiar with the passage in Revelation where the apostle John is on the isle of Patmos and he sees a vision of the risen Lord and the text reads, and when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. But this Baptist pastor is going to walk right up to Jesus and shake his hand for all he has done for him.

Unfortunately, that is how many of us view God in our day. We don't maintain a high view of God, let alone fear him. He's become our pal, someone like us on our level.

Heaven help us. The book of Hosea has a vivid imagery of what happens to a people who forsake God and are completely unaware of it. It is found in Hosea chapter 7 verses 8 through 9. Ephraim, he hath mixed himself among the people.

Ephraim is a cake not turned. God describes his people as a cake, burned on the bottom and not aware of it. Now listen to the judgment of God upon his people for their grievous sins against him.

Ephraim is joined to his idols, let them alone. God has withdrawn his presence from them and that, friends, is the worst thing that can happen to an individual or a nation. When God turns you over to your sins, it is the saddest day of your life.

Many today in the churches of our land are like that half-turned cake away from the heart of God and completely unaware of it. There is a fine line between obedience and disobedience in the Christian walk. It

is easy to grieve the Holy Spirit even in a ministry decision or advice to a friend.

Therefore, it is critically important to stay connected to the genuine vine under a cloudless sky and be in the flow of the Holy Spirit continually. We must constantly examine ourselves to see if our hearts have hardened in any capacity toward the Lord. We are warned in the book of Hebrews against this.

Wherefore, as the Holy Ghost saith, Today, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the days of temptation in the wilderness, when your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years. Wherefore, I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do always err in their heart, and they have not known my ways. So I swear in my wrath, they shall never enter into my rest.

Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God. Notice God speaks of provoking him through our unbelief. How easy it is to sin against him by our unbelief.

This should make us trample friends and cause us to fall on our faces in a heart-searching capacity, asking God by His Holy Spirit to search our hearts to show us anything that is grievous to him in our lives. I wrote a book on the doctrine of repentance entitled Return to Me, and in that book I list 75 symptoms of spiritual sickness. A pastor friend from Boston asked me where I came up with the 75 items on this list.

I said many were from personal experience. So before you mistakenly presume this preacher is better than you, you are wrong. I know the wicked windings of my own rotten heart, and I fully realize I am a trophy of God's grace, and there is nothing in me worthwhile except the Christ in me.

This list of symptoms of spiritual sickness is a broad list that will cover a wide range of individuals, but listen friends, it is so easy to become hardened over some silly thing and grieve God's heart. So this list is wide enough to see if we are away from the heart of God, and it is narrow enough to convict us to go deeper with God. But the main thing about this list of 75 areas of spiritual sickness is this, if you unhappily find yourself on this list, then be frank and honest and confess that God has withdrawn his presence from you lately, then repent and return to him.

When the prodigal son got up from his hog pen and said, I will arise and go to my father, he took the first step to get out of that bad situation and he made his way home. When the father laid eyes on his wayward son, he didn't wait for the son to walk up to him, rather the father ran to the son, threw his arms around his neck with abandoned love. God wants us to stay in a red hot relationship with him, and when we move one inch away, he knows it.

I will now read you these 75 spiritual hardenings, and if you find yourself on this list in conviction of the Holy Spirit, be honest with yourself and seek God with a repentant heart and renew your close and vital fellowship with the Almighty once again. Here now is that list, please listen carefully as I read these out to you.

Sin no longer shocks you, the world possesses your heart, you are bitter against another person, you complain frequently and grumble about your circumstances in life, you seldom read your Bible, seldom if ever do you pray, and if you do they are selfish prayers centered around I, me and us, you care little for those around you perishing and going to hell, you do not support mission endeavors either with your time or finances, your time and your money are yours to do what you please and to please yourself, the things of God hold little importance in your life, attending church is a bother to you, throughout the day your focus

is on everything but God, you continue to repeat the same sins, you have a habitual sin which you keep confessing but you never get victory over, you never pray for

revival, you are content with watered down preaching, your conversation is filled with sports, the world, entertainment, but seldom do you ever speak of Christ or spiritual things, you continue to linger on lustful thoughts, you enjoy sexually stimulating entertainment, you have no witness to the world that you are a saved individual, you have ceased to pursue God like the heart after the water brooks, you do not want to know God in a deeper way, you do not maintain an intimate relationship with Jesus, Jesus is not your master, you love your sins more than you love Jesus, you seldom worship God and praise Him, you do not pursue holiness, the most important things to you are your job and your family, you are not moved to indignation with the wicked society around you, you are given

offensive anger, you have unforgiveness towards another, you resent certain individuals and they disturb your peace, someone has offended you and you seethe when you see them, you are comfortable in the world and its amusements, you have little thoughts regarding eternity, things of eternal worth do not grip you nor stir you, you have no joy of the Lord, you have a spirit of ingratitude, you care little for advancing the kingdom of God, you have lost your sweetheart love for Jesus Christ, self is king, you know nothing about the cross and the life of the believer, your mind is set upon material things, your thoughts are occupied with things of this earth, you are a very prideful person, you tell lies, you are a hypocrite and you are hiding this from others, you are envious of others, you

have no taste for spiritual things, religion is a chore to you, you do not like to hear the word of God preached, you have no interest in disciple making, your prayers are formal and without heat or heart, you have dry eyes when you pray, your heart does not break over the lost condition of others, it is all about you, you have no desire to find out what is on God's heart, you have no desire to go deeper with God, Jesus is welcome as your Savior but he is not welcome as your Lord, your heart has grown cold and callous towards spiritual things, you seldom hear the voice of God, you would rather play golf or another sport rather than read your Bible or pray, you haven't witnessed to a lost person in over a year, you don't share your faith on a regular basis, you haven't wept over the lost

and perishing this month, you feel you are above others and expect special recognition, you fear man more than you fear God and you are not jealous for God and his glory, you have behaved badly toward another and feel no remorse, you are full of yourself, you are mad at God, you have hatred in your heart toward another, lust easily consumes you like a house fire, you like to boast and brag about what you have and what you've done, you have an ungrateful heart toward God, you haven't thanked God recently for all the blessings he has poured out on you, your feet are quick to do evil and you are insensitive to spiritual things and care little for things of eternal worth, oh friends, if you have found yourself on this list, please shut yourself up with God and return to him with a sincere

heart, the withdrawn presence of God in your life is a judgment upon you, but there is a promise from God to those who are away from God, God's word declares, return to me and I will return to you, return to him and he promises to return to you with the love of his presence in your life once again, a ministry without the presence of God is a dead ministry, a Christian not under the discipline of the Holy Spirit is a poor example to a lost and perishing world, return to him friends, I urge you right now, if you are a pastor and you are grieved over the spiritual condition of your church members and you know in your heart that God has withdrawn his presence from your church, then I suggest calling a meeting with your people and being honest with them that you feel corporately you as a

people have grieved God away from among you, but now it is your desire to seek him passionately and fervently and sincerely with a broken and contrite heart, then pastor, call this special meeting and sit in sackcloth and ashes with your people until the God who hears the cries of his people answers you with his felt presence again, you are the appointed shepherd over your flock, so you lead the way, if they see you broken and disturbed over your own spiritual coldness, then perhaps they will be convicted as well and together you can turn your church around to where the lost are drawn to it like a magnet because of the felt reality of a holy God in your midst, this is revival friends and this is what true Christianity should be, not this churchianity we have grown accustomed to where we

sit around each week and play like we know God even though he is a million miles away, get serious with God friends and he will get serious with you and it will radically alter your prayer life, it will shake up your domestic situation for the better and it will transform your church into the living organism that is a biblical model for true Christianity, I will leave you with this thought, in the gospels there was a place where Jesus felt comfortable and this place was the dwelling of Martha and Mary and Bethany, there he could relax and kick off his sandals and enjoy himself and enjoy their company, pastor my prayer for you is that your church will become a place like that, a Bethany where Jesus is comfortable dwelling in your midst, remember dear friends when we can sadly lament but my

beloved hath withdrawn himself and was gone then there is nothing worse than the withdrawn presence of God in a nation, in a church and in a person's life, listen friends ask the God of the Bible to fill your sanctuary and have preeminence there once again, return to him with your whole heart, remember that God is a God of revival, he can revive your heart, he can send revival to your church and he can send revival to this poor nation of ours once again, wouldn't it be wonderful to see God move in our land and sweep it from coast to coast with a powerful hell-shattering revival, oh let the prayer of our hearts be this, let us say with the psalmist give ear oh shepherd of Israel thou that leadest Joseph like a flock, thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth before Ephraim and

Benjamin and Manasseh, stir up thy strength and come and save us, turn us again oh God and cause thy face to shine and we shall be saved.

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