

Manifest Presence - Part 5

by Richard Owen Roberts

The sermon calls for humility and contrition as essential for experiencing the manifest presence of God in our lives and communities.

Duration: 28:55

Scripture: Isaiah 57, Matthew 7:7

Topics: "Humility Before God", "Seeking His Presence"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of having a high view of God and being humble before Him. He addresses the issue of pride and encourages listeners to honestly examine themselves and deal with any pride they find. The speaker also highlights the need to seek God diligently and not treat Him as if He is at our beck and call. He references Isaiah 57:15, where God declares that He dwells in a high and lofty place but also with the contrite and lowly in order to revive them. The sermon emphasizes the need to have a contrite spirit and seek God wholeheartedly in order to experience His manifest presence.

Transcript

relationship between the certain fact that the presence of God is not largely manifested in the world and the problem of abortion. Abortion could not exist in a land where there was an awesome sense of the presence of God, and where we want then to experience the sense of God's presence. This problem would be dealt with in a fashion that it cannot be dealt with by legislation or by any other method.

Now I would be the last one to discourage stirring up concern and trying to deal with this problem by human means, but I don't believe it can be dealt with when there is no sense of God in the land. And we do live in a time when there is no sense of God, when people have no fear of God. The second matter that you have felt very sensitive about, just as I have, the man that got up and disrupted the service, I spoke to at considerable length before the service.

I pled with him to go home. I knew he was going to disrupt the service. He is a man who has been suffering mental problems for many, many years.

At times he's on top of them, and he's a sincere, and a sweet, and a humble Christian. But today, when I walked in the door, about the same time you were coming in, he came right up to me and he said, I am the Lord. I am Alpha and Omega.

I declare war against this church, and I'm going to set this church straight. He intended to say a whole lot more than he said, but thankfully he was ushered out. But I say there is a relationship between mental problems and the presence of God, just as there is a relationship between drunkenness and the presence of God.

When there is no sense of the presence of God in the land, sin multiplies, problems of all kinds multiply, and of course the reverse of this is true. When there is a wonderful sense of God, there is also a dealing with problems at a level that is simply incredible. Some of you perhaps are interested, as I am, in the whole history of revival movements.

And one really doesn't understand revival movements. Now I'm not talking about revivals that are staged, but true movements of the Spirit. One doesn't understand these movements unless they recognize that the very heart of a genuine revival is God coming near.

That's what constitutes revival, and that's what makes revival so absolutely wonderful and so highly desirable. Now I'm not much interested in special meetings, and I don't think there's all that much importance in things that men stage, but when God himself determines to draw near, it is perfectly wonderful. Some of you perhaps have read that in Wales, the Principality of Wales, during that great season of revival in 1904 and 1905, week after week the judges in the principality came into the court and laid a pair of white gloves on the podium, and that in Wales was a symbol that the docket was clear.

There were no cases to be tried. Now would it be a magnificent thing if here in Wheaton, and all over America, the presence of God was so magnificent, so real, so powerful, that crime of every sort simply stopped? And I have been saying to you that there is a direct link between what we are, what we think, what we do, and God's presence. And I have tried to point out to you that it is not so much the fruit, f-r-u-i-t, sins that contribute to the absence of God, as the root sins.

And the great root sins of which scripture speaks are made clearly evident in the book of Jude, where the problem is addressed from the standpoint of the Israelites, from the standpoint of the fallen angels, and from the standpoint of the Sodomites. And in dealing there with the root sins, the root of unbelief is declared, the root of arrogancy or pride is made known, and the root of rebellion is indicated. Now I would like to address your attention this morning to a passage that talks about the Lord himself, and I believe in a very lovely way unfolds his own heart.

I ask if you will please to join me as we look at the book of Isaiah chapter 57. Isaiah 57, I will read the chapter, but just focus upon one brief portion of it. The righteous man perishes, and no man takes it to heart.

And devout men are taken away while no one understands. For the righteous man is taken away from evil, he enters into peace. They rest in their beds, each one who walked in his upright way.

But come here you, sons of a sorceress, offspring of an adulterer and a prostitute. Against whom do you jest? Against whom do you open wide your mouth and stick out your tongue? Are you not children of rebellion, offspring of deceit, to inflame yourselves among the oaks under every luxuriant tree, who slaughter the children in the ravines upon or under the clefts of the crags? Among the smooth stones of the ravine is your portion. They are your lot, even to them you have poured out a libation.

You have made a grain offering. Shall I relent concerning these things? Upon a high and the lofty mountain you have made your bed, you also went up there to offer sacrifice, and behind the door and the doorpost you have set up your sign. Indeed, far removed from me, you have uncovered yourselves and have gone up and made your bed wide, and you've made an agreement for yourselves with them.

You have loved their bed, you have looked on their manhood, and you have journeyed to the king with oil and increased your perfumes. You have sent your envoys a great distance and made them go down to Sheol. You were tired out by the length of your road, yet you did not say it is hopeless.

You found renewed strength, therefore you did not faint. Of whom were you worried and fearful when he lied and did not remember me, nor gave me a thought? Was I not silent even for a long time? So you do not fear me. I will declare your righteousness and your deeds, but they will not profit you.

When you cry out, let your collection of idols deliver you, but the wind will carry all of them up, and the breath will take them away, but he who will take refuge in me shall inherit the land, and shall possess my holy mountain, and it shall be said, build up, build up, prepare the way, remove every obstacle out of the way of my people, for thus says the High and Exalted One, who lives forever, whose name is Holy. I dwell in a high and holy place, and also with a contrite and lowliest spirit, in order to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite. For I will not contend forever, neither will I always be angry, for the spirit would grow faint before me in the breath of those whom I have made.

Because of the iniquity of his unjust gain, I was angry and struck him. I hid my face and was angry, and he went on turning away in the way of his heart. I have seen his ways, but I will heal him.

I will lead him and restore comfort to him and to his mourners, creating the praise of the lips, peace, peace to him who is far and to him who is near, says the Lord, and I will heal him. But the wicked are like the tossing sea, for it cannot be quiet, and its waters toss up refuse and mud. There is no peace, says my God, for the wicked." Now that's a difficult chapter, very, very complex, and if you haven't read it recently and haven't studied it, I dare to say you were not able to follow with ease all that it says.

In fact, let me be even more direct and say I don't pretend to understand all that it says. But this much is quite evident, even on a surface reading. There is a very real contrast in this chapter between those who are proud and those who are broken.

And the thrust of what I want to say to you this morning, and feels so very essential to say, is that there is nothing that contributes more greatly to the absence of God's manifest presence than human pride. If ever you should desire God to flee from you, you can be assured he will do so if you will allow pride. God in a variety of ways, and certainly in numerous places in Scripture, has made it ever so clear that he resists the proud in heart.

And there is nothing that more readily will drive God from a person's presence than the toleration of a spirit of arrogancy. And to that I must add the dimension that is troubling to some, and that is that not only does God deal individually by leaving, in terms of his manifest presence, those who are proud in heart as individuals, but he also withdraws from whole churches. He withdraws from denominations, and he withdraws from nations that are proud in heart.

So if you have traveled abroad in recent years, and heard the opinion of other persons concerning us as a nation, and if you have heard in fact some of our spokesmen in other places, you're aware as I am that

there is hardly a word that better characterizes Americans than pride. We are indeed a very arrogant and boastful people. We have reason for great thanksgiving, but I can't think of any reason we have for pride.

The Lord has been teaching me, I don't think I've learned it adequately, but he has been teaching me that there is an immediate and an indissoluble link between pride and stupidity. And whenever I'm even the least bit proud, at that moment I am grossly ignorant, for I've not one thing to be proud of, but a vast variety of things to be thankful for. Well in this chapter the issue of pride is a very paramount issue, but I don't think it's important to focus upon it this morning, but rather will you look at me now for just these few that are ours.

At verse 15, where the Lord God himself speaks and makes an unfolding of such proportion that I am convinced that each individual that lays hold of this truth and responds to it in an appropriate way will know something of the manifest presence of God that exceeds what he could know on any other basis. For thus says the High and Exalted One, who lives forever, whose name is holy, I dwell in a high and a lofty place, and also with the contrite and lowliest spirit, in order to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite. I have indicated to you the opposite of what is stated in verse 15.

God always withdraws from the proud in heart. He speaks of holding them at arm's length. He makes it crystal clear that he can have nothing to do with those who are proud in heart, but here he declares the other side, and it is perfectly wonderful.

He himself dwells in a high and a lofty place, but he chooses also to come among to dwell with those who are contrite and those who are broken. So I suggested to you last week what a wonderful thing it would be, how highly desirable if this choir were to come to the permanent conviction that the presence of God in a manifest fashion was the most desirable thing this church could ever look for. And if you were to commit yourselves to doing anything and everything that would make it possible for God to draw near and to show himself, to manifest himself in this congregation.

And here you see we have an instruction that tells us what is really the very heart of this whole matter. He does draw near those who are broken and contrite. Now how does one get broken and contrite? Sufficiently broken, sufficiently contrite for God to draw near in this way.

Well I love this particular verse because the whole picture is found within the verse. What if you were to give serious consideration to these words, thus says the high and the exalted one. Have you given adequate consideration to those words? The high and the exalted one.

We are always in danger of having too low a view of God. And I cannot perceive any danger whatsoever of our having a view of God that is too high. Too low? Yes.

Too high? No. What if this morning as a very honest person you say to yourself, there's a lot of pride in me. It's unreasonable.

As stated already it's stupid, but it's there. I don't like it. I'm proud of my musical ability.

I'm proud of my housekeeping ability. I'm proud of the way I do my job. Well what if you find pride in yourself? How do you deal with it? Do you say to yourself, well I'm done with pride.

That's it? No more? Well sure go ahead, but I don't think you'll have much success. But what if you really want to put away the thing that offends God the most? How can you put it away? Well the best way to put

it away is the way recommended here. Get the view of God that is accurate.

When you really begin to see who God is, when you have an adequate sense of God, you are certain to be reduced to a very, very low level personally. No room for pride in an individual who has an exalted view of God. You see pride comes, and this chapter, if you were to go through it carefully, it makes it perfectly plain.

When a person forgets who God is, and begins to elevate themselves to the level where they almost think of themselves as God. Now that happened this morning. I mean a man stood in front of us, and he said, I am Alpha and Omega.

Maybe you thought he was just speaking for the Lord, and was about to deliver a message that he thought he received from the Lord. No, in truth, I mean I talked to him at length. I know the man well.

He came saying, I am Alpha and Omega. But frankly it wasn't a problem of pride in his case. It's a mental problem, and a severe mental problem.

Do pray for this poor man. But while he represents a mental problem, I doubt that that would be true of any of us. If we have an exalted view of ourselves, I don't think it's a mental problem.

I dare to say it's a spiritual problem. Focus on these words, thus saith the High, and the exalted one, or the lofty one, as the King James says. You see, the way we live, you would almost think that God dwells here, that the dwelling place of God is earth.

Just take the matter of how we think people can be saved. We make it so simple, so easy. We say to a person, well it's just as easy as falling off a log.

The Lord walks down the street, and you see him on the street, and you say, oh good morning Lord, and hallelujah, the church says you're now a Christian. Because you acknowledge the existence of God. Now wait a minute, what if it's true that he is the High, and the lofty one, the exalted one? What if in fact it is also true that he dwells in a high and lofty place? If God is who he says he is, and if he dwells where he says he dwells, that means people don't stumble across him accidentally.

That means in fact that the scriptures speak aright when they say, seek ye the Lord while he may be found. You see, the missing element in much of American evangelicalism today is seek, seek, seek. The scriptures are loaded.

If you were to go through your Bible and circle every time the word seek is employed in connection with our duty to seek God, you'd be amazed at how many times this appears. But we don't seek God. Why? Well because we don't need to.

God is here. God is everywhere. I mean why do you have to seek that which is commonplace? But God does not describe himself as commonplace.

He describes himself as the High, and the lofty one, who dwells in a high and lofty place. And if I began to envision that God is indeed not commonplace, but high and lofty, it's going to have an effect upon what I think of myself. As long as God is ordinary, and just a little bit bigger than me, I'm going to be crowded with human pride.

But when God becomes in my mind and heart what he really is, I'm not going to have anything to be proud about. He goes on here to say that he lives forever. I like the King James better than this New American Standard at this point.

In the King James it says he inhabits eternity. Will you just think of those words? Thus says the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity. Now here we are, don't misunderstand me, but we say to the one who is high and lofty and who inhabits eternity, you now have 30 minutes or an hour.

Isn't it astonishing? Have you read the Old Testament recently? Isn't it astonishing that people in the Old Testament who were surely less spiritual than New Testament Christians, sometimes spent seven days doing absolutely nothing but seeking God? You couldn't get an American to spend seven hours. And sometimes they had such a lovely time seeking God for seven days, they added seven. It doesn't make sense for anyone who inhabits time to say to the one who inhabits eternity, hurry up! And yet that's how we treat God.

As if he were at our beck and call, as if our time was the important thing and he better sit in. Would you really like to take as a burden this whole matter of the coming again of the manifest presence of God to this church? Well then don't get in a rush. Don't crowd God.

Don't tell him how much time you're willing to give to this matter. Flow with God. Be humble enough to admit that your time is in his hand, that all the time you have is his time.

And use that time in whatever way would please him. He goes on to speak not only of his inhabiting eternity, but he also declares that his name is holy. Now a lot of nice things have been said about me over the years, fewer however than not so nice things.

But the man that got up this morning and declared himself to be the High and the Holy One, the Alpha, the Omega, said to me, you're a fine man. I have higher regard for you than anybody else. Well, I've had some nice things said about me, even my wife has said some very kind things.

But nobody, not even my mother ever said to me, your name is holy. It's not. All that know me and the better they know me, the more certain it is.

My name is not holy and my being is not holy. I struggle with this. I yearn to be holy.

I see it as a level to which all of us should move. But God doesn't seek to be holy. It isn't his goal to be holy.

He is holy. Everything about him is holy. Well, those words you see are intended to put things in perspective.

He's high, he's lofty, he inhabits eternity, his name is holy. And we're none of those things. But he says that he chooses to dwell also with those who are broken in contrite.

Contrite literally means ground to powder. When I was a youth trying to earn my way through college, I got a job once selling a garbage disposal unit, one of those things that fit under the sink. It was called rinse-away garbage disposal.

We took this unit into the home and the demonstration was you dropped a Coke bottle into the garbage disposal unit and it came out like face powder. It did really. If you dropped in a slimy lettuce leaf, however,

it was another matter.

But the word contrite means ground to powder. I choose as God to dwell also with those who are contrite, those who are broken. I could not impress upon you strongly enough how important I believe it is for God to draw near.

This church, this city, this nation, the great problems that we are struggling with, the things that our hearts are yearning for solution for, are immediately related to the presence of God. But God will never draw near a people that are too proud to get down on their faces and see him. He'll never draw near people that put higher emphasis upon what they do than what God does.

And while I would never do anything to discourage you practicing and giving your best to your music, may I plead with you this morning to add the dimension of seeking God corporately, so that the blessing of God may be upon what you do the very best you can do. For God does indeed dwell in a high and lofty place, but also with the broken and contrite. We live in an age that needs to see the manifest presence of God.

Lord, will you help this dear choir? Oh God, help each individual to begin to enter in meaningfully, feelingly, into that humility, that brokenness that comes from a real knowledge of who you are. Move and accomplish thy will and purpose, we plead in Jesus' strong name. Amen.

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