

GOD'S PRESENCE - OMNIPRESENCE

Early First Nations People had a unique practice to train their young braves. On the night of the young brave's 13th birthday, on his threshold of manhood, after learning hunting, and fishing, and scouting skills, he was put to one final test. He was put into a dark, dense forest, and was expected to spend the entire night alone. Up until that point he had never been separated from his family and tribe where there was a lot of security for him. But on this night, he was blindfolded and taken several miles away. After taking off the blindfold, there he was in this thick woods. And after what would seem like eternity, finally dawn would break, and the first rays of sunlight would break through the dense forest. And he would look around, and to his utter astonishment he would see down the path an outline of a man standing there holding a bow and arrow. It was his father! He had been there all night, watching over his son, protecting him even though he couldn't see him.

Today we are continuing in our series Getting to Know God. Last week we talked about the fact that God is all knowing – omniscience. Today we want to talk about the fact that God is also everywhere – omnipresence.

Psalms 139:7-12 Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? 8 If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. 9 If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, 10 even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. 11 If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me," 12 even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.

Omnipresence means that God is everywhere at once. He is completely present everywhere at the same time. Paul Little states that "God is not a substance spread out in a thin layer all over the earth. All of Him is in Chicago, in Calcutta, in Cairo, and in Caracas, at once and at the same time." God is everywhere at once. There's no point in the universe where God is not. He is not limited by time or space. He is not confined to any one location.

That is a hard concept for us because we are finite creatures. Have you noticed that it is impossible for you to be in two places at once? You may have wished that you could be in two places at the same time but you can't. I face this every week as I stand at the door. I would like to greet and talk to everyone but there is only one of me. Maybe you have wished you could have said hi but there was already someone talking with me. Imagine that they invented a time machine that would allow you to go back in time 24 hours. This afternoon I get into that time machine. That would mean that this morning there would be two of me. That would certainly make things better. But then both of us go back. That means this morning there would be 4 of us. Now imagine I keep doing that until there is one of me for every one of you. I could give everyone my complete and undivided attention.

God is infinite. He does not dwell within time and space so he can be completely with and give His undivided attention to every person on earth at the same time.

When Henry Norris Russell, Princeton astronomer, had concluded a lecture on the Milky Way, a woman came to him and asked: "If our world is so little, and the universe is so great, can we believe that God pays any attention to us?" Dr. Russell replied, "That depends, madam, entirely on how big a God you believe in."

Saying that God is omnipresent does not mean that God is IN everything. That's called pantheism. Don't confuse the creator with His creation. I am not saying that God is part of everything, but He is everywhere at once and can be with every person at once.

This scripture tells us three things about God's presence;

1. DEPTH (vs. 8) – God is with us spiritually

Psalms 139: 8 If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

The word here used for depths is the Hebrew word SHEOL or hell. David is not saying here that God is in hell. In fact, hell is the one place in all creation that God is not. There are times when we may feel like it. All of us have good days and bad days. The good news is that God is always with us no matter how we are feeling – whether we are up or down. Whether we are having a mountain top experience or in the deepest darkest night of our lives. The Holy Spirit is *with* us and *in* us – connected with our spirit. David once wrote;

Psalms 25:16 Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted.

Have you ever felt like David did? Have you ever felt lonely and afflicted? There may be someone in this room that is lonely right now. Some of the loneliest times in my life is when I was surrounded by people. It is interesting that we live during a time where there were never before more people on the planet and yet more lonely people. For all our 'social networking' loneliness is on the rise.

There are many different kinds of loneliness. There is loneliness that comes from a new SETTING. You move to a new place (our country) and you have a hard time learning the culture and making friends. You miss your home. There is the loneliness that comes from SICKNESS and the death of a spouse or friend. There is the loneliness of the SITUATION that you are in. Maybe you are single and think that marriage would help but there are a lot of lonely married people as well. There is even the loneliness of SUCCESS. Life at the top can be a very lonely place.

There are many different kinds of loneliness. There will be times when you are lonely in life. God made the universe and declared it good, but the Bible says that there was one thing He found in it that was not;

Gen 2:17 It is not good for the man to be alone...

So what do you do when you are lonely? You recognize God's presence and you rest in His promises. He is our companion and He is always with us.

Hebrews 13:5 ...God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

God's Spirit is with ours. He is our constant companion. Remember the song "You'll Never Walk Alone" -- it's true. You have a constant companion; God is always with you. No matter if you feel like you are in heaven or in hell right now, God is with you. You may not feel like it, but it is true.

Yuri Gagarin from Russia was the first man to reach outer space. He orbited the earth in the Vostok spacecraft on April 12, 1961. It was widely reported that he said after he returned to earth "I flew into space and didn't see God." Just because he didn't see Him does not mean that He was not there.

As one pastor said when he read that quote to his congregation the Sunday after it had first been announced "Well, if he had stepped out of his spacecraft, he would have met him in a hurry!" On a side note, it was actually Khrushchev who said it. His friends said Yuri Gagarin was a Christian.

God is present no matter what the depth.

2. DISTANCE (vs. 9-10) – God is with us physically

Psalms 139: 9 If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, 10 even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.

God is with us not just in every SITUATION but also in every SETTING. No matter where we go in all creation, we know that God goes with us.

Maybe you have heard the story about the lady with a young son. He was looking at a full moon one night, and he asked, 'Mom, is God in the moon?' The mom explained that God is everywhere. 'Well, is God in my tummy?' 'Well, I suppose so' she responded not sure where these questions were leading. Then he said, 'Mom, I think God wants a banana!'

I am not sure the theology of that story, the point is that God is EVERYWHEE. There were times the nation of Israel forgot this truth. At times they felt that God was far off and had left them.

Psalms 137:1-4 By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. 2 There on the poplars we hung our harps, 3 for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" 4 How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land?

God is always with us. I have been in some very scary places in my life. I have run out of air scuba diving over 60 feet down in shark infested waters. I remember the day our car lost control on black ice on the 401 and spun completely out of control. I once got lost and found myself walking in a dangerous Palestinian area outside of Jerusalem that was really unsafe. I remember the night we landed in Kuwait and the realization of what we had just done began to sink in. Through all of these experiences I have always had the peace and assurance that God was with me.

Jonah learned this lesson the hard way. He thought that he could run and hide from God, but even in the belly of the whale, God was with him. Keith Green once had a song that said "Well, you can run to the end of the highway and not find what you're looking for. No, it won't make your troubles disappear. And you can search to the end of the highway and come back no better than before. To find yourself you've got to start right here."

When we lived in Kuwait I saw this lesson in the lives of so many people. One guy I knew had come to Kuwait trying to run away from God. He had been burned by the church in the past and figured he would leave his Christian background. He ended up attending the church and getting saved in Kuwait. God goes with us no matter how far we may wander.

God is present no matter what the depth or distance – spiritually and physically.

3. DARKNESS (vs. 11-12) – God is with us emotionally

Psalms 139: 11 If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me," 12 even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.

This reminds me of this scripture;

Isaiah 43:2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.

It reminds me of the story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, or as we learned in Sunday School, Your shack, My shack and a Bungalow. They walked through the fire and found God was with them. They were protected. No matter what fire you may be facing, God is with you as well.

Moses had dark days. He led the nation of Israel out of the promise land, but there were difficult days when he felt the burden of leadership.

Exodus 33:12-18 Moses said to the LORD, "You have been telling me, 'Lead these people,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. You have said, 'I know you by name and you have found favor with me.' 13 If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you. Remember that this nation is your people." 14 The LORD replied, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." 15 Then Moses said to him, "If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. 16 How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?" 17 And the LORD said to Moses, "I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name." 18 Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory."

How do you practice the presence of God? How do you remind yourself that God is always with you? You do what Moses did, you seek God's glory. How do you do that?

First, in order to experience the presence of God in your life you have to invite Jesus to be your lord and saviour. God is everywhere around you, but He does not dwell within you until you invite Him to do so through His Holy Spirit. Accept him into your life today.

Second, learn to be quiet. So often we miss the presence of God because we are so busy that we miss it. Learn to be comfortable with silence. I believe why so many people never feel God's presence is because they're too busy and distracted. Take time to just be quiet and listen to God.

Thirdly, talk to God about everything. Pray continually. Prayer is simply having a conversation with God. Since God is always with you, that conversation should be ongoing. Learn to spend time with God throughout your day as you go about your business.

Lastly, develop the habit of praise. Praise means to thank God for who He is and what He's done for you. Nothing will help you become aware of God and His presence in your life faster than developing the habit of constant praise.

I mentioned a few minutes ago the story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego. Let's read that story;

Dan 3:16-18 Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. 17 If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. 18 But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

We know from the story that after they are thrown into the furnace that God meets them there and walks in the furnace with them.

Maybe you have seen that there is a new movie out now called I Can Only Imagine 2. It is the ongoing true story of Bart Millard, the lead singer of the Christian band MercyMe. When his son was diagnosed at age 2 with diabetes he struggled in understanding why God would have allowed this illness to happen. This difficult season in his life, along with the story we just read of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego is the inspiration behind the song Even If;

I know You're able and I know You can
Save through the fire with Your mighty hand
But even if You don't
My hope is You alone

I know the sorrow, and I know the hurt
Would all go away if You'd just say the word
But even if You don't
My hope is You alone

What is the take away from the movie? God is in the fire. You are never alone.

Maybe you are here today and you understand that God is omnipresent, but you are not feeling it. Maybe you feel like God has abandoned you. Maybe you are in a place of darkness, wondering why God has left you alone. I just want to tell you today that God has never left you. He is there with you now in this place and has a plan for your life. The all-knowing ever-present God of creation is with you. Even in the fire, God is with you.

Like the story that I started with, you may think that you are in the forest alone facing the darkest night of your life, but God stands with you through it all, bow in hand watching over you.