

Text: Acts 7:44-50, Title: Missing the Presence of God, Date/Place: 1.19.17, AM

- A. **Opening illustration:** John Piper writes, "if God wants to love us infinitely and delight us fully and eternally, he must preserve for us the one thing that will satisfy us totally and eternally; namely, the presence and worth of his own glory. He alone is the source of full and lasting pleasure. Therefore, his commitment to uphold and display his glory is not vain, but virtuous. God is the one being for whom self-exaltation is an infinitely loving act." (Pleasures of God, p. 282).
- B. **Background to passage:** Stephen was accused of blasphemy of Moses and God, the law and the temple, and the pharisaical traditions. He has countered with a brief, but incredibly significant highlight reel of the history of the covenant salvation of Israel. After a long point on his support of Moses and his telling of the coming of the Righteous One, he finalizes his argument with a laser beam focus on the presence of God, with support from the movement from Joshua, to David, to Solomon, to the Righteous One. He is bringing them to two points, first, throughout the history of salvation, God always said that He would be their God, and they would be his people. Secondly, that they missed it! The most important thing that they sought, most important thing in the history of Israel, in the fulfilments of the covenants, God with them.
- C. **Main thought:** Three manifestations of God beg the question for us about the daily experiential presence of God in our lives. Miss it or not?

A. **Joshua (Joshua 1:5)**

1. Taking over for Moses with the monumental task of leading the people into the promise land for the conquest of Canaan, the pressure to follow Moses' example, power, and leadership would have been intense. So, in the first verse of the book, God begins to speak, giving Joshua his charge and some encouragement. So God is speaking to Joshua directly, and says two things, 1) as I was with Moses... 2) I will not leave you or... God, in whatever form or means he was using to speak, promises Joshua his continuing, abiding presence. Elaborating, saying that every place the sole of his foot touches, God has already been there giving it to Joshua. Also, in verse nine, reiterating that God will be with him "wherever" you go. This was really important to Joshua and the people because everyone knew God was with Moses, and everyone saw the cloud by day, and fire by night. The tabernacle was the symbol of that presence, but this was a confirmation. Pay attention to the language, after Stephen spoke of the tabernacle Moses made (which was the symbol of God's presence), being brought into the land by Joshua. The presence of God was being brought nearer to its resting place (symbolically), of course, in Stephen's eyes the fullness of time for the Righteous One to be the presence of God was drawing near. This was his point, the presence of God. Joshua and Israel of the conquest didn't miss it. They recognized it, and revered it.
2. Argumentation
3. **Illustration:** At the heart of the Christian message is God Himself waiting for His redeemed children to push in to conscious awareness of His Presence. -Tozer
4. The presence of God as encourager and conqueror

B. **David (2 Sam 7)**

1. David's experiential path with God had begun quite a while before this interchange with God, but this may be the most significant. Here David was king and was convicted that he had a wonderful cedar-lined palace, and yet God dwelt in a tent in Jerusalem, where David had brought the presence of God in the tabernacle. After an initial go ahead from Nathan, God spoke and instructed David not to build. Instead he made a promise. God promised David that his offspring would build a temple for God, BUT he also promised that the presence of God would be with David's lineage as his kingdom would last forever. The Davidic covenant was made in the midst of a denied request. This is huge in the salvation history and future of Israel fulfilling many prophecies, and setting things into motion that would bring about the presence of God among his people in the form of the Righteous One.
2. Argumentation
3. **Illustration:** John Piper: "We have come to take all the relatively minor benefits of following Jesus and elevated them above the massive, real pleasures of knowing him, loving him, and dying and being with him forever. Everything's out of proportion in typical American Christianity."
4. The presence of God as a covenant keeper.

C. **Solomon (1 Kings 8:11, 27-29)**

1. This is probably the most glaring example of the presence of God, because this was the completion of the house that was built for his presence to dwell within. Even though he told David that he had never dwelt in a place, he also instructed Solomon to build it. Once it was built, he showed up. The shekinah glory of God blasted into his new home with such power that the priests were unable to minister. Can you imagine the priests diving out of the new temple in terror amidst blinding light? The people were outside, big dedication, big celebration, but God was the show stealer. A massive manifestation of the presence of God.
2. Argumentation
3. **Illustration:** Brother Lawrence wrote about *The Practicing the Presence of God*, Edwards wrote in his *Religious Affections* about his experiencing God, Blackaby wrote a study entitled *Experiencing God*, Piper wrote about *Hungering for God, and Desiring*, and these were not just abstract, philosophical, hypothetical, theoretical concepts. Countless believers and writers and missionaries experience him...
4. Now, I am not trying to get all mystical with you, but I think because of the fear we have in not wanting to be caught up in the excesses of other groups, we have swung the pendulum too far. We are scared of seeking an experiential presence with the Almighty. We are now the temple of God, indwelt by the Spirit, and we know that he is active in our lives every day. We don't have to pray in King James English, because we are talking to a God that wants us to know him, see him, experience him.

D. **New Testament Presence (v.)**

1. The Word made flesh. They missed that. We are in Christ positionally. Our union with Christ is our link to the presence of God. Vine and the branches. We are indwelt with the Spirit. Our union is deep and crucial to our identity of who we are in Christ. It is the constant, abiding, indwelling, real presence of God in our daily lives.
2. Col 2:6-7, Rom 7:4, 6:5, 1 Cor 6:17, 15:22, 45, Gal 2:20, John 14:20, 23, 2 Peter 1:4,
3. **Illustration:** "Union with Christ is not union with a system of doctrine, nor with external religious influences, nor with an organized church, nor with an ideal man,—but rather, with a personal, risen, living, omnipresent Lord (J. W. A. Stewart)", **Trying to find a union of coöperation or of sympathy, he is amazed to learn that there is already established a union with Christ more glorious and blessed, namely, a union of life; and so, like the miners in the Rocky Mountains, while he is looking only for silver, he finds gold. Christ and the believer have the same life. They are not separate persons linked together by some temporary bond of friendship,—they are united by a tie as close and indissoluble as if the same blood ran in their veins.**¹
4. In our walk with/in Christ, we are called to many things in the Spirit as our constant experience with the presence of God. Often we think of the presence of God as the goosebumps, the conviction, or the impression of the Spirit as the Word is spoken, or the tears that are experienced in public worship; however, if that is the extent of our experience with the lifeblood of Jesus that flows through our veins, we are deprived of the knowledge of the fullness of His presence. We are called/instructed to walk in the Spirit, pray in the Spirit, be filled with the Spirit. We are to walk in Christ, abide in Christ, which includes staying in his word as a means to experience him. We are told that we have the mind of Christ. Christ is in you, with you, around you, speaking to you, leading you, bringing things to your mind, opening your eyes to the needs around you, giving you words to speak in the hour that you need them.

¹ Strong, A. H. (1907). *Systematic theology* (p. 802). Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society.

- A. Closing illustration: John R. W. Stott once admitted the truth that many of us have felt but failed to confess: "The thing I know will give me the deepest joy -- namely, to be alone and unhurried in the presence of God, aware of His presence, my heart open to worship Him -- is often the thing I least want to do." The world is perishing for lack of the knowledge of God and the Church is famishing for want of His Presence. The instant cure of most of our religious ills would be to enter the Presence in spiritual experience, to become suddenly aware that we are in God and that God is in us. This would lift us out of our pitiful narrowness and cause our hearts to be enlarged.
- B. Recap
- C. Invitation to commitment

A tract entitled "The Seven Together" sums up the Scripture testimony with regard to the Consequences of the believer's Union with Christ:

1. Crucified together with Christ—Gal. 2:20.
2. Died together with Christ—Col. 2:20—ἀπεθάνετε.
3. Buried together with Christ—Rom. 6:4—συνετάφημεν
4. Quickened together with Christ—Eph. 2:5—συνεζωοποίησεν
5. Raised together with Christ—Col. 3:1—συνηγέρθητε
6. Sufferers together with Christ—Rom. 8:17—συμπάσχομεν.
7. Glorified together with Christ—Rom. 8:17—συνδοξασθῶμεν.

Union with Christ results in common sonship, relation to God, character, influence, and destiny.²

² Strong, A. H. (1907). *Systematic theology* (p. 803). Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society.