



BEHOLD YOUR GOD - WEEK 12
Seeking the God We Are
Beholding

Opening prayer

Prayer for the persecuted church:

Prayer for a local church:

This morning we pray for our brother Chris Suitt and New Hope Church.

Closing prayer

This series has not just been about beholding God and understanding Him, it has been about beholding God and experiencing Him. That's what it means to know God. It doesn't mean to know about God. We don't want

secondhand knowledge of God. We want to know God for ourselves. So, what we're really talking about is God's presence in our lives and particularly, God's presence in the church, as we gather together.

INTRO: How does the Bible depict God's presence among His people?

First off, the Apostle Paul sets everything in the middle of the gospel, everything springs

from the gospel. Believing the gospel becomes our motivation for seeking God as believing the gospel becomes our motivation for obeying God.

2 Corinthians 6:16-7:1 (NLT)

¹⁶ And what union can there be between God's temple and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God said:

**“I will live in them
and walk among them.**

**I will be their God,
and they will be my people.**

Now, if God is in the midst of a group of people, if He walks among them, you would think that would be noticeable.

**¹⁷ Therefore, come out from among
unbelievers,
and separate yourselves from them, says
the Lord.**

**Don't touch their filthy things,
and I will welcome you.**

Don't live like those who don't know Christ, because you know Christ.

If they're smoking pot, should you be smoking pot? If they're having sex before marriage, should you be having sex before marriage? If they're chasing after material wealth, should you be chasing after material wealth? You live for Someone else now. That's the idea.

**18 And I will be your Father,
and you will be my sons and daughters,
says the Lord Almighty.”**

7 Because we have these promises,

In other words, since we have the gospel,
since we have the forgiveness of sins and the
Holy Spirit within us... since we have these
Old Testament promises about Christ, Paul
says...

dear friends, let us cleanse ourselves from everything that can defile our body or spirit. And let us work toward complete holiness because we fear God.

So, Paul based seeking the nearness of God in the gospel. And when we speak of the nearness of God, we speak of God's known presence.

So, today we're looking at how the Bible depicts God's presence among His people.

And that is what the gospel has done, it has brought God near in Christ. But what does the Bible mean by the nearness or presence of God?

When we examine the biblical doctrine of omnipresence, we see there is a difference between God's general presence in this world and God's presence among His people. And when that is not obvious, there are problems within the church.

Are we satisfied with a distant God? Are you satisfied with only a secondhand knowledge of God?

So, to begin, let's look briefly at God's general presence in the world, what is commonly known as God's omnipresence, that God is everywhere.

Psalm 139:7-8

⁷ I can never escape from your Spirit!

I can never get away from your presence!

**8 If I go up to heaven, you are there;
if I go down to the grave, you are there.**

God is everywhere. This is a truth about God, but it is not a comforting truth. God is everywhere. He is in the local bar that opens at ten in the morning on a Sunday. He is at the local mosque when they gather on Fridays. He is at the local sporting event that takes Christians away from church on Sunday mornings, but He is not in any of these places in a way that anyone would recognize His presence. That's why it's not comforting.

That's when the church needs to ask herself, "If people do not know God is with us, then what are we doing here? Are we satisfied with a distant God?"

The church may be, but the world is not. This is a question those outside the church are asking, "Where is God?" The tragedy is that they should know He is with us, the church. But do they recognize His presence among us?

We should be satisfied with nothing less than God's manifest presence among us.

Exodus 33:15-16

¹⁵ Then Moses said, “If you don’t personally go with us, don’t make us leave this place. ¹⁶ How will anyone know that you look favorably on me—on me and on your people—if you don’t go with us? For your presence among us sets your people and me apart from all other people on the earth.”

Christians are distinct, Christians are different, not just because of what we believe, but because of what it is like to be in our presence when we are gathered together. People should come into a church and it should feel differently to them, because God is among us.

But it's not always that way, is it? This is why there is the term "a dead church." And this isn't referring to a church that closed down, but to a church that is void of God's presence.

There is no nearness of God in a “dead church.”

Now, why would God’s nearness be absent from His church?

Hosea 5:15

**15 Then I will return to my place
until they admit their guilt and turn to
me.**

**For as soon as trouble comes,
they will earnestly search for me.”**

“I will return to my place” is another way of saying, “I’m leaving.” So, God withdraws His known presence from His people, He brings them to a place of despair and distress, God withdraws from them in order that they will repent and seek Him.

Jeremiah 29:13

¹³ If you look for me wholeheartedly, you will find me.

What's the first thing we learn from this promise? God's presence will not be with half-hearted Christians.

This is what the famous verse in Revelation is about, half-hearted Christians.

Revelation 3:14-20

¹⁴ “Write this letter to the angel of the church in Laodicea. This is the message from the one

who is the Amen—the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God’s new creation:

15 “I know all the things you do, that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish that you were one or the other! 16 But since you are like lukewarm water, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth!

This is about the withdrawal of God’s presence from His church.

17 You say, ‘I am rich. I have everything I want. I don’t need a thing!’

You hear attitudes like this in the church today:

“God has promised me prosperity.”

“All I need is the gospel.”

“All I need is the Bible.”

Sorry. But what’s the point of the gospel? What’s the point of the Bible if you do not have the actual presence of the Living Christ

in your life? Isn't that the point of the gospel?
To bring us into relationship with the Living
God?

So to say, "All I need is the gospel," is to miss
the point of the gospel.

**And you don't realize that you are wretched
and miserable and poor and blind and naked.**

In other words, can you even recognize if your
Christian life is impoverished or not? Is that
the state we're supposed to live in? Being

poor, blind and naked? Jesus would tell us no. As a matter of fact, he does in the next verses.

¹⁸ So I advise you to buy gold from me—gold that has been purified by fire. Then you will be rich. Also buy white garments from me so you will not be shamed by your nakedness, and ointment for your eyes so you will be able to see.

What is the church's problem? And what does it need today? Can you see it?

19 I correct and discipline everyone I love. So be diligent and turn from your indifference. 20 “Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends.

When just one person realizes the sad state of the church and seeks the Lord about it, there is hope. But only when the church realizes her state does she return to Christ. Only when she realizes that she is without the manifest

presence of Christ in her midst will she repent and seek Him.

But she is lost in her idols. She is lost in her pragmatism. She is lost in every defilement of body and spirit. She is grieving the Holy Spirit.

Now, Scripture shows us a process that takes place in the life of the church when we grieve God with our disobedience and sin, in short, with our unbelief, because that's where disobedience and sin come from — unbelief.

God takes a church through this process when they do not listen. When they do not obey. When they do not do what God has made plain for them to do.

I'm amazed at how many Christians act like they don't know what God wants them to do, as if God has hidden His will from us. It's right here — what He's told all Christians to do. It's not extremely difficult.

But this process that God takes us through begins when...

1. We grieve the Holy Spirit.

Isaiah 63:10-14

**¹⁰ But they rebelled against him
and grieved his Holy Spirit.**

**So he became their enemy
and fought against them.**

The church today doesn't know who she should really fear. The church fears many things, but she doesn't fear grieving the Holy

Spirit the way she should. A church fighting the world in her own strength with her own plans and her own ideas is a church that will eventually despair of the world around her even as she blames the world around her for her present state and the state of the world. “As the church goes, so goes the world.”

If we don't see ourselves as the problem, we blame our condition on things that are not the problem. They might be symptoms of a fallen world, but they are not the things causing the problems in the church herself.

So, after we grieve the Holy Spirit...

2. God withdraws His presence from us.

¹¹ Then they remembered those days of old when Moses led his people out of Egypt. They cried out, “Where is the one who brought Israel through the sea, with Moses as their shepherd?”

Where is the one who sent his Holy Spirit to be among his people?

The church finally notices, “Hey, God’s presence doesn’t appear to be with us.” We don’t sense that He is near. Where is the God who did all these things?

And that’s the third step in the process...

3. God stops working in our midst.

¹² Where is the one whose power was displayed

**when Moses lifted up his hand—
the one who divided the sea before them,
making himself famous forever?**

The church notices that God doesn't appear to be working among them.

So, when a church grieves the Holy Spirit and God withdraws His presence and stops working among them...

4. The church loses direction.

The church loses direction because God isn't among them. When God isn't among them, He's not leading them.

God has already told us His will for us. If we're not willing to follow God's plain will as He's laid it down for us in the Scriptures, why do we think He'd tell us anything else?

¹³ Where is the one who led them through the bottom of the sea?

**They were like fine stallions
racing through the desert, never
stumbling.**

When church committees are honest, they'll admit, "We have no clue as to what decision to make. We don't know what path to take. We don't know what God wants us to do." Here's the thing: They don't realize, they don't know what to do because they not doing it.

- Telling my children to "pick up your room, vacuum it and make your bed."

That's the point, we feel lost when we're not doing what He's told us to do.

What happens when a church loses direction?

5. Everything's a big deal in church, except God.

**¹⁴ As with cattle going down into a peaceful valley,
the Spirit of the Lord gave them rest.**

**You led your people, Lord,
and gained a magnificent reputation.”**

When God's presence is with His church, His name is glorified. When God's presence is not with His church, everything in church is a big deal, except God.

So, what's the remedy? Well, we have to go back to the gospel. The gospel is the foundation as Paul tells us in 2 Cor. 6 — because we have these precious promises —

what? We should sit around and think about them?

6. The church must pray like her life depends on it.

When the church realizes her state, she begins to pray.

Isaiah 63:17

¹⁷ Lord, why have you allowed us to turn from your path?

**Why have you given us stubborn hearts so
we no longer fear you?
Return and help us, for we are your servants,
the tribes that are your special
possession.**

Because if God's presence does not return,
the church becomes even worse.

Isaiah 63:19

**¹⁹ We have become like those over whom you
have never ruled,**

like those who are not called by your name.

**Sometimes it seems as though we never belonged to you,
as though we had never been known as your people.**

The lives of the people in church become no different than the lives of the lost people that surround them.

Now the church not only prays, but she begins to pray even more honest prayers. Not polite prayers. Gut wrenching prayers that make the hearers uncomfortable.

Isaiah 64:1-4

**Oh that you would rend the heavens and
come down,**

**that the mountains might quake at your
presence—**

² as when fire kindles brushwood

**and the fire causes water to boil—
to make your name known to your**

adversaries,

**and that the nations might tremble at
your presence!**

**³ When you did awesome things that we did
not look for,**

**you came down, the mountains quaked
at your presence.**

⁴ From of old no one has heard

**or perceived by the ear,
no eye has seen a God besides you,
who acts for those who wait for him.**

**Oh, that you would burst from the heavens
and come down!**

**How the mountains would quake in your
presence!**

**² As fire causes wood to burn
and water to boil,
your coming would make the nations tremble.**

**Then your enemies would learn the
reason for your fame!**

**³ When you came down long ago,
you did awesome deeds beyond our
highest expectations.**

And oh, how the mountains quaked!

**4 For since the world began,
no ear has heard
and no eye has seen a God like you,
who works for those who wait for him!**

There is one thing the nations tremble at —
God's presence. Whatever you think the hope
of this country is if it is anything other than
God's presence — you are wrong. You are
dead wrong. You are tragically wrong.

So, there is only one way forward.

7. Brokenness is the only way forward.

Admitting our brokenness is the only way to get fixed.

Isaiah 57:15

¹⁵ The high and lofty one who lives in eternity, the Holy One, says this:

**“I live in the high and holy place
with those whose spirits are contrite and
humble.**

**I restore the crushed spirit of the humble
and revive the courage of those with
repentant hearts.**

Hearts sorrowful for the state of the world.
Hearts sorrowful for the state of the church.
Hearts sorrowful for their own state, their own
coldness, their own ignorance... and yet not
despairing.

Jeremiah 29:11-13

**¹¹ For I know the plans I have for you,” says
the Lord. “They are plans for good and not for**

disaster, to give you a future and a hope. ¹²In those days when you pray, I will listen. ¹³If you look for me wholeheartedly, you will find me.

Let's look to a friend of Job for a way forward. They provide us with signs of humility. Even though Job's friends were idiots, that tells you something about us when we can learn from them.

Job 22:21-30

²¹ “Submit to God, and you will have peace;

then things will go well for you.

Confess. Believe.

**22 Listen to his instructions,
and store them in your heart.**

Discover His will through His Word.

**23 If you return to the Almighty, you will be
restored—
so clean up your life.**

Discover His will through His Word, then do it.

**24 If you give up your lust for money
and throw your precious gold into the
river,**

**25 the Almighty himself will be your treasure.
He will be your precious silver!**

Stop trusting in your material wealth and
other idols.

**26 “Then you will take delight in the Almighty
and look up to God.**

You can't delight in God and money. You can't delight in God and your idol. You can't dance with the world and expect the presence of God.

**27 You will pray to him, and he will hear you,
and you will fulfill your vows to him.**

Pray.

28 You will succeed in whatever you choose to do,

and light will shine on the road ahead of you.

You'll find yourself moving forward in the Christian life with clarity.

29 If people are in trouble and you say, 'Help them,'

God will save them.

30 Even sinners will be rescued;

they will be rescued because your hands are pure."

**Then you will find God working through you,
through us.**

Are you satisfied with a distant God?

- **We cannot manipulate God's presence**