

if you could ask God ANYTHING...

Week commencing 14th October 2018

Notes for next Sunday's sermon on Acts 17:22-31, "Why Aren't You More Obvious?"

DAY 1: Read Job 23:1-9

In this passage we find Job articulating a complaint that most of us have made at some point; Why isn't God more obvious? Why is he so hard to find? Why is his presence so subtle that many people miss him? Job says, "If only I knew where to find him" (v.3). He further explains God's elusive nature in verses 8-9; "If I go to the east he is not there; if I go to the west, I do not find him. When he is at work in the north, I do not see him; when he turns to the south, I catch no glimpse of him". The prophet Isaiah makes a similar complaint, more succinctly; "Truly, you are a God who hides himself." (Isa 45:15).

Have you ever felt a similar frustration? Have you ever wondered why God doesn't make himself more obvious? Surely a whole lot more people would believe in him and follow him if he just came out into the open more than he does! Surely God wants people to turn to him, so why does he seem to be hiding?

Have you ever had periods of time when God's presence seems elusive in your own life? When your prayers seem to bounce off the ceiling and God seems distant? Of course, it may be that, at times, we are out of step with God, either due to unconfessed sin or simply due to neglect of prayer and Bible reading. But there is more to it than that. God, by his very *nature*, is not obviously visible to humanity, for a variety of reasons that we will explore next Sunday.

DAY 2: Read John 4:1-26

This is a very familiar passage to many of us, but the verse I would like you to note is verse 24, where Jesus declares that "God is spirit". Here we find, in these three simple words, a profound truth. God is not a physical being. He does not have arms and legs and a body. He is a **SPIRIT**. And this is why he is not easily visible to us. Part of his elusiveness is his very *nature*. The scriptures reflect this important truth in a number of places:

Colossians 1:15 "He is the invisible God"

1 Timothy 1:17 "To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God"

These and other passages indicate that God is not limited to a physical existence in our physical universe. If God was a physical being, he could not be omni-present (present everywhere, all the time), because a physical being is limited to a specific location. God's incorporeal nature (not having a physical body) enables him to be at every point in the universe simultaneously.

Psalms 139 is a beautiful declaration of the omnipresence of God. Spend some time reading and reflecting on this psalm now.

DAY 3: Read Acts 17:16-25

Here we read of Paul's famous evangelistic efforts in the city of Athens, as he uses their fascination with religion to introduce them to the true God of creation. For our purposes today, note his declaration towards the end of verse 27; "God is not far from any of us, for in him we live and move and

have our being." At this point, Paul is addressing the very issue that we are discussing this week; the apparent elusiveness, or invisibility, of God. Why is he so difficult to see? Paul's answer is a reflection of the truth we discussed yesterday; that God is a non-physical *spirit*. His statement to the Athenians, that *"in him we live and move and have our being"* indicates the immensity of this spirit-God. Our whole lives are lived *"within"* him. Our planet, our solar system, our galaxy, the entire universe with its billions of galaxies, all reside *"within"* God. He is an *immense* spirit. This does not infer an immenseness of physical size, but an immenseness of *presence*.

The prophet Isaiah describes this immenseness, when he says, *"God holds the universe in the span of his hand"* (Isa 48:13). He is speaking anthropomorphically here (attributing physical, human characteristics to God as a metaphorical way of describing his attributes). The important point for us to grasp, however, is that God is an immense, trans-dimensional spirit, whose presence easily encapsulates the entire universe. We should not expect to bump into such a transcendent being down at the local RSL club or in the checkout queue at Coles! Those who complain about not being able to easily see God have a grossly inadequate concept of his trans-dimensional nature. Paul refers to the great irony that even as people debate God's existence, *"within him they live and move and have their being"* (Acts 17:25).

DAY 4: Read Genesis 3:8-24

This fascinating account of the fall of mankind and our expulsion from God's immediate presence has much to say about why God is no longer easily visible to us. Verse 8 indicates that in the Garden of Eden God manifested himself to mankind in some kind of physical way, for *"he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day"*. We are not told exactly what form God's manifestation took; perhaps he took the shape of a human form. There are many physical manifestations of God recorded in the Bible; a burning bush, a pillar of cloud, a pillar of fire, a gentle wind, a thunder cloud on top of Mt Sinai, a visitor to Abraham, a whirlwind to Job etc. These physical manifestations are known as theophanies. We must not infer that these theophanies represent God as he really is, for the definitive statement of scripture is that *"God is spirit"* (Jn 4:24). Theophanies are, therefore, convenient temporary, physical manifestations that enable God to meaningfully interact with humans from time to time.

The important point for us to note here, however, is that the fall of mankind in Genesis 3 separated us from God's immediate presence in a profound way. Verse 23 says that we were *"expelled / banished from the garden of Eden"*, and not only from the garden, but also, apparently, from the ongoing privilege of interacting with God's tangible presence. Adam and Eve no longer regularly encountered God in a tangible way, and neither do we. Part of the reason for God's hiddenness, his elusiveness, is the spiritual separation from Him that occurred when we fell from grace. When people complain that God is not obvious, they need to understand that it is our rebellion which made him so.

We can only imagine what tangible intimacy we may have enjoyed with our Creator, had we not rebelled against him. Yet it is not all doom and gloom. Our redemption in Christ promises us the sure and certain hope of renewed intimacy at the consummation of God's Kingdom. The Apostle Paul writes that *"then we shall see face to face"* (1 Cor 13:12), and John declares prophetically, *"God's dwelling is now among the people and he will dwell with them ... and he will be with them"* (Rev 20:3). In the Kingdom that is to come, God's hiddenness will finally be removed and God's people will experience his tangible, visible presence eternally; the restoration of the intimacy that was lost in the beginning.

By Kevin Simington