Teaching for 10-31-07

The Power of God's Presence

King David was a passionate pursuer of God's presence. He expressed his heart-sick longing for the Lord in Psalm 63:1: *"O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you in a dry and weary land where there is no water."*

That same heart-cry is rising up in many around the world today. There is a longing for the Lord to once again display His manifest presence in revival and transformation. There is a longing for the Lord to respond with a power that captures hearts and leaves people breathlessly in the awe of God.

This is more than just a "warm feeling" in a church service. We can be quick to claim the presence of the Lord when most likely is not really the "manifest presence" of God as understood through biblical and church history. In past revivals, it was the manifest presence of God that changed lives and transformed communities. In a booklet entitled *When God Stepped Down from Heaven*, by Owen Murphy, there is an account of the profound presence of God in the Hebrides Revival:

Undoubtedly the outstanding feature of this spiritual awakening has been the deep consciousness of the Presence and Holiness of God so overwhelming at times that people were afraid to open their mouths lest they utter words that would bring upon them the judgment of God. Sinners, over awed by the Divine Presence, would fall helplessly, crying for mercy. People walked quietly before God and, as in every true revival, "the shop became a pulpit, the home a sanctuary, and the heart an altar!" (pg. 23)

David knew what this manifest presence God felt like, and he earnestly sought after God. He was no longer a "casual inquirer" of the Lord, but a man who was passionately committed to knowing God more deeply. We can learn from David's wholehearted devotion to seeking God.

First Movement: David's Longing for God
Psalm 63 can be understood in three parts or movements. The first is David's longing for God as reflected in verse 1. David not only expresses to the Lord the longing and thirst of his soul and body for God, but the fact that he ***earnestly*** seeks after God. He did not busy himself with religious activities or casually pray to the Lord when convenient. This was seeking with his whole being—body and soul—in much the same was as the Prophet Hosea encouraged: *Let us acknowledge him, let us press on to acknowledge him* (Hosea 6:3).

Second Movement: David's Passionate Pursuit of God
David's passionate pursuit of God was not based on an idealistic dream or some distant legend from times past. The second part of this Psalm gives both the motivation and the fulfillment of his longing in verse 2: *I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory.* David's longing was based on the reality of beholding and actually experiencing the presence, power, and glory of the living God.

God's presence was not merely a theological concept or doctrinal truth for David. David had tasted the reality of the manifest presence of the living God, and he wanted more of Him. David knew from experience that God was what he really needed for soul and body. Whatever else he craved paled in comparison to a personal encounter with the Living God.

Third Movement: David's Radical Transformation

The rest of Psalm 63 constitutes the third movement of this Psalm. Having been in the presence of the Living God, David had a radical transformation in his life, his goals, and his worship. From verse 3 on, David expresses the results of having seen the Lord in the sanctuary. It affected his manner of speech (*my lips will glorify you*, vs. 3), it affected the direction of his life (*I will praise you as long as I live*, vs. 4), and it affected the goals of his life (*my soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods*, vs. 5).

David's lifestyle was so altered by the presence of God that his sleep patterns were affected (vs. 6), and the confidence and stability of his life was measured by the reality of the presence of God in his life (vs. 7-8). His understanding of the inequities of life was transformed by his belief that his focus was to be on God and not on the circumstances around him (vs. 9-11).

Lessons From David

We can busy ourselves with all kinds of religious activities. We can pray together, hold meetings, and even do good deeds for our community. We can train ourselves in the latest techniques in Christian ministry, all of which can very good things. But absolutely nothing will transform a life or a community like the very real and manifest presence of the Living God.

In a day when we are enamored with effective ministry and programs, let us take some lessons from David in Psalm 63. Do we honestly reflect the kind of passion for God's presence that David expressed when he says, *my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you?* How is that passionate pursuit reflected in the way you talk with others or use your time? Do you know how to pray and fast as an expression of your body longing for Him? Do you welcome the presence of God that will reveal your hidden sins and motivations?

Let us not become weary in our seeking for this kind of manifest presence of God in our communities. It is our hope that is indeed something worthy of all of our earnest longing. Hosea 6:3 is a promise of God's faithfulness. The Lord says that if we press in to acknowledge Him and earnestly seek Him, then as surely as the sun rises in the morning, so He will come to us.

God's faithfulness is as sure as the rising of the sun. And guess what? The sun came up again this morning!

So the promise is still true. He is still faithful, and if we earnestly seek Him He will come in all His true manifest presence.