

A Powerful Presence, Part 1

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[0 : 00] I'm not sure I'm living up to that, but I want to. With all my heart, I want Jesus to be the center of my joy.

That phrase has made it into my vocabulary. I'm just asking God to make sure he makes it into my heart, not just my vocabulary. We are returning to our study in the book of Acts, chapter 2.

Just a few more messages, two or three, depending on how far we get today. Thank you for your prayers for our time away. It wasn't as restful as we hoped, but it was what God provided.

It's what's provided. And so we thank the Lord for his mercy. We did some traveling, and I'm going to mention some of that in my message this morning. Let's pray.

Father, oh, that you would be in Jesus, the center of our joy. That we wouldn't just sing those words, but we would experience them by your grace.

[1 : 12] You would so pour out your spirit on us here at New City Fellowship. That it would be said of us that whatever you say about that church, Jesus is the center of their joy.

He's everything to them. Lord, only you can make that happen. And so we submit ourselves to you, to your word.

Lord, we have gathered today on the Lord's day to declare you are worthy as we have sung and prayed and given. Oh, Lord. Oh, Lord.

Receive our worship. In Jesus, receive our worship. And as we come to your word, receive our worship as we hear. And receive my worship as I preach.

Blessed be the name of him who is light and glorious. Teach us the fear of the Lord.

[2 : 13] In Jesus' name. Amen. Passage that you know by heart. Acts 2, 42 to 47.

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

And awe came upon every soul. And many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common.

And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people.

And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. Now that is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

[3 : 21] Please be seated. Again, thank you, praise team, for leading us so well. There is a great desire among God's people to experience his presence.

That's what we love for. We were saved to live in his presence. Now, I believe he wants to show us his presence.

I believe he wants us to know his presence all the time. Now, how we go about seeking his presence can get kind of interesting.

Churches try, I'm not going to say, churches try all kinds of things to experience some sense of the divine among them. Some of it gets a little weird.

But it's a desire. Because we recognize we haven't gathered here alone. We're not by ourselves in this room.

[4 : 36] When the call to worship was given. We invited God in. And he is present.

The beautiful thing about revival is that the presence of God gets amped up. And God reveals himself extraordinarily among his people to bring his church comfort, encouragement, and make her alive.

That's why we seek revival. That's why we're studying Acts 2. That's a revived church. A spirit-filled church. All throughout history, that's what God does.

He wants us to know his presence. My wife and I, we went with the Ellis's as well. We were on a mission trip this summer. The first week in August, I think it was.

We were in Nassau. And we had a worship service. And it was extraordinary. The young man got up to, from the moment he gave the call to worship, you knew God was present.

[5 : 44] You just knew something special was happening. He was... Dr. Carl Ellis preached his soul out. Preached a powerful message.

And then I was asked to lead in communion. So I got up and I began to fence the table to talk about communion. And to invite those who believe in Jesus to the table of the Lord.

And I'll never forget, as I finished doing that, I sat down while two of the elders began to hand out the communion elements.

And while they were doing it, I'm sitting here, and a lady was singing this wonderful song. And I'm sitting there listening. A little boy. He must have been about two, three.

He just got up from the back of the church. And he walked down front. And he just stood there at the table. The two elders were standing over here.

[6 : 41] I was sitting there trying to figure out what's going on. What do I do? There's a little boy standing here, you know, in front of the table.

And I didn't want to get up because the lady was singing. I didn't want to disrespect her. I'm trying to figure out what to do. And so I'm... In my mind, I'm hurrying her up. Finish it.

Okay, we got it. Beautiful. Stop singing. I'm just... Because I want to get to the little boy. And she...

And then he just turned around and walked back to his seat. I'm like, oh, man.

What? And she finished singing. I came up front. And I just said, where's that little boy?

Somebody's sending him back up here. And his mother...

I don't even know why she allowed him to walk down into the front. She... Well, I think I know. I've talked to her afterwards now. But he walks back down. His name was Sean. And I'm not saying I prophesied over this little boy.

[7 : 41] But I knew I had to say... I had something to say to him. And I spoke to him. And encouraged him, I hope. I think God's going to use that little boy.

He's going to grow up. But afterwards, I went and found his... Well, I'm sorry. He went back and sat down. And then the pastor said, we need to pray. And he started having...

He started an impromptu prayer line. Like we do on 5th Sunday for... 4th Sunday for healing. He just started praying. Me and Sandy, we're laying hands on people.

We're just praying. We're just praying. It was all impromptu. Spontaneity does not mean the spirit, by the way. It's okay. You can say it. You got to know that.

All because it's spontaneous doesn't mean it's the spirit. However, the spirit does do things like that. And so, we prayed for people and tears.

[8 : 38] And I think somebody rededicated their life to the Lord. It was a beautiful time. I went and spoke to the little boy's mother afterwards. I said, what was he... He never said a word. He never said a word the whole time.

And I said, sweetheart, what was he... Do you know what that was about? She said, he wanted communion. I was like, oh. God moved.

We sensed his presence. It happened again. Something like that. We were at a place called Windshake. This is just the day we had the picnic.

And we were there that weekend for training to assist pastors and their wives for refreshment. We were doing some training with them. Getting trained, actually. And we were singing.

We gathered together to sing and have a brief message. And the spirit of the Lord, we couldn't stop singing.

[9 : 39] It was... His presence was so heavy in the place, weeping. I mean, I'm not a crier a whole lot, but man, I knew God was with me.

And we... And the guy leading us, he did what I hate. Acoustic guitar. That's all he had.

Because that reminds me of college ministries, you know, Campus Crusade for Christ, the old crew. And I always feel like, come on, give me that hand in, baby. You know, that's me.

That's me, okay? Okay. So he's doing this. And that's... And he's singing. And the spirit of God. We just...

We could... Matter of fact, the guy who was leading the program got up and said... The young man went to put his guitar down. He walked up and said, no, no, no, no, no, no. Keep singing. He just started...

[10:42] He just pulled out some more songs. And we... The presence. We live for that. The sense that God is among us.

Nothing can be the same. And we sense his presence. So this morning, I just want to begin saying...

Seeking Christ's kingdom presence and power in the fellowship... Will transform all of our lives. His presence will do stuff in us. And Jesus wants us to bask in the power of his presence. And it will mean... An attitude change. Talk about that in a minute.

[11:46] We've been looking at this passage for months. And we've already seen that when the kingdom presence of the spirit... The spirit fills the church. That church gives herself to Christ's priorities.

Right? That's verse 42. What are Christ's priorities? What is God's... What is God's mission? We don't have to make it up. What is God's mission? What is God's vision for his church?

Well, here it is. That we would be devoted to the apostles' teaching. The breaking of... The fellowship. The breaking of bread. And the prayers. That's what he wants.

That's his vision for his church. Right here in 42 to 47. You'll see it in microcosm. This is it. This is part of his mission and vision, as it were, for his church.

We are to go into the world displaying these marks in our devotion to Jesus. But God's presence by his spirit brings something else into the life of the church.

[12:45] And we would do well to seek. And it's this. In the kingdom presence of the Lord, we experience fear.

Fear. F-E-A-R. Verse 43. And awe came upon every soul.

And many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. This verse is the result of a church experiencing God's powerful presence.

The word for awe, A-W-E there, is phobos. Literally, it means fear. Fear. We get our word phobia from this word.

And for us, the word phobia is what? An irrational fear. An irrational fear of something that's unlikely to cause us harm.

[13:51] That's why it's irrational. We talk of hydrophobia, right? Fear of water. Acrophobia. It's an intense fear of heights. Agoraphobia.

Agoraphobia. Fear of places or situations that make us feel helpless. But the fear of the Lord is not irrational.

It is most rational. It makes good sense, in other words. And it is beautifully Christ-honoring.

To fear God is to be in awe of his majesty, his love, and power. It is reverence for his person and ways.

Amen. At one point in the church's history, we would refer to someone who was serious about following God as God-fearing.

[14:57] He's a God-fearing man. She's a God-fearing woman. Where did that go? Have you ever heard anybody described that way? We don't even use the phrase.

Something's happened in the 20th century and the 21st century. We don't talk that way. To our detriment and horror.

That we don't refer to anyone as a God-fearing person. We don't even talk about the fear of the Lord. It's not part of our speech. Sadly, that means it's not part of our theology.

It's not part of our doctrine. It's not part of our faith. Something's happened. When we don't talk about this anymore. One of my heroes, Jerry Bridges, gives us a good guidance in what the fear of the Lord entails.

He says, it involves emotional feelings of awe, reverence, honor, and adoration.

[16:01] Stimulated within us. Watch this. As we have great thoughts about God. When we encounter his majesty, splendor, holiness, and love.

He says, listen, the fear of the Lord is an emotional response as we have big thoughts, great thoughts about God. Not the little thoughts about God.

Big thoughts about God. Based upon the scriptures. Big ideas about God. And it happens because we are encountering something. We are encountering his majesty, his splendor, and his holiness.

And I want to add now, we're going to add to this. This all happens as we, by faith, see Jesus. We see Jesus in awe of all he has done for us in creating, redeeming, and sustaining us. How big is your Jesus? When you have big thoughts about God and Christ, you are humbled before him.

[17:12] Submitting to him with great respect for him. You ever meet someone famous?

Or maybe not famous. Just someone that you admire greatly. You don't know them. And you meet them. What happened when you did?

You think they were great. And you're in their presence. And you just... John Perkins came here some years ago. This church has been a friend of John Perkins for many, many years.

And he came to do, I think, a fundraiser for Hope, our community development ministry, Hope for the Inner City. And I'll never forget, my wife had met Dr. Perkins some years ago and had dinner with him.

So it was great to see him again. He didn't remember us, of course. You know, we were nobody. You know, but we had a great time with him years ago back in Philadelphia. And just because you don't know who John Perkins is, he's the African-American father of Christian racial reconciliation, mercy, and justice ministry.

[18:25] Amazing. God, he's still around. He's in his 90s, isn't he? John's in his uncle. John's in his... Just wrote another book, I think, some time ago, recently. Sandy and I had...

Sandy and I... We sat with him at his table. And we were like two giddy kids. We couldn't... We said, oh, can you take pictures? We got our girls next to him.

You're going to take a picture with John Perkins girls. And we all got in there. I mean, because we were giddy. We were like kids. We were like, oh, John Perkins. We're sitting next to John Perkins.

Our kids are sitting next to John Perkins.

It was a privilege to be in his presence. The fear of the Lord is much more powerful than that.

Amen. It's that.

It's not even in the same category. When you recognize you are in the presence and you live, not just in our worship, but every day, you and I as the people of God live in the real presence of God.

[19:29] The phrase is quorum deo. We live before the face of God. As his people. You're never alone. Amen. Now, there are many benefits to a healthy fear of the Lord.

Let me give you a few. The fear of God is not something that destroys us. I think that's sometimes why we don't talk about it, because we're afraid of the fear. Because we don't understand it.

The fear of the Lord builds us up. Those who truly fear the Lord do not have to worry about him causing them harm, because the fear of God is very good for the soul.

Proverbs 19.23. The fear of the Lord leads to life. Whoever has it rests satisfied. He will not be visited by harm.

Holy smoke. Really? Leads to life? Life! Listen. The fear of the Lord causes us to walk in obedience to God.

[20:38] Now, let me... We're going to turn to this one. I know you brought your Bibles. You don't need the screen. You've got a Bible, right? There's one in the pew. Exodus chapter 20.

Why don't you just grab it real quick? This is a big one. Exodus chapter 20, verses 18 to 21. While you're turning, I'll set the stage. Here you go. This is the Ten Commandments being given.

God has now given his commandments. He touched Mount Sinai, and he came down. His presence came down on the mountain. It's like it erupted like a volcano, and the people were standing there, and Moses goes up, and he comes down with the tablets.

Well, he will come down with it. But first of all, listen to what happens. He... God is displaying his awesome presence for his people. Watch in verse 18 to 21.

Now, when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning, and the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled.

[21:44] And they stood far off, and they said to Moses, Moses, listen, you speak to us, and we will listen. We promise. But do not let God speak to us lest we die.

See, God had actually, in the giving, he actually spoke the Ten Commandments. They heard the voice of God from the mountain. He spoke it.

Before tablets, God spoke it. Now, watch this. Moses said to the people, now listen to this statement. Watch this. He says, do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin.

People stood afar off while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was. Did you hear what Moses said? Do not fear, but fear. And no one said anything.

Double speak? No. No. Do not fear is God is not coming to hurt you. Do not, this is not, do not be terrified as if God is going to strike you.

[23 : 00] You are his people, saved by, and by the way, they were saved by grace. Amen. Amen. Amen. God's giving of the law was a function of his grace to them.

He saved them first, then gave them his law. Just want you to be clear about that. Do not fear, but fear.

So, do not be afraid that God is going to get you. Do not be afraid of him, but fear him. Reverence, standing on of him. God showed them.

Remember, all that Egypt stuff, all those plagues, the parting of the Red Sea. And now, so they can be at Sinai. What was God doing?

Showing them his holiness, his greatness, his power. He showed them, I got this. And I got you. And he showed them that nothing can stand before me.

[24 : 03] Nothing can stand against me. I am omnipotent. Egypt, the most superpower of that era, fell like leaves off a tree.

Under a strong wind. Nothing can stop him. He wanted his people to respect his person.

He told them, don't you even touch the mountain. You can't even, I'm holy. Don't you touch the mountain or you die. He is holy. He wanted them to respect him and realize who he is and not play with him.

But at the same time, the fear of the Lord draws us in. To fear him.

They said, we are your people. They became his people. And they followed him through the desert, led by Moses. Well, they had issues, don't get me wrong. But he did this so that, why?

[25 : 01] What did Moses say? He said, this is what we need, that you may not sin. This is why he's showing them his greatness and his majesty and his glory.

So that they will know they take him seriously. They don't take him for bad. They don't take him for bad. They don't disregard him.

They don't think that he's someone they can play with. He's not their homie in heaven. He's not the man upstairs. The fear of the Lord leads to obedience.

Because we take him seriously. Also, the fear of the Lord leads to integrity. Nehemiah said of himself, said so of himself, in the book of Nehemiah, Nehemiah chapter 5.

He said of himself, he said, listen, Nehemiah 5.15. The former governors who were before me laid heavy burdens on the people and took from them, from their daily ration, 40 shekels of silver.

[26 : 11] That was a heavy burden. High taxes, okay? Very high taxes. He said, even their servants lorded over the people. But I did not do so because of the fear of God.

Nehemiah said, I treated the people right. I'm their governor. I treated them right. And I didn't put heavy taxes upon them. And let my servants be bosses.

And just strut around. And, you know, throw their weight around kind of thing. He said, no, because I fear God. Oh, that all of our elected officials fear the Lord.

Family, the church suffers greatly in our worship, our fellowship, our personal and social righteousness. Because I wonder if enough of us are walking in the fear of the Lord.

Integrity. How do you do business? How do you do your job? Your job's important to God. You do it as unto him.

[27 : 16] And everything we saw yesterday in Colossians 3 and the music conference. And everything we do, do it unto the Lord. We do everything in the name of the Lord. That should mean in the fear of the Lord.

How do we go about our business? How do you? How do we go about our sins? We tend sometimes to treat our sins lightly. Even make excuses for them because we don't see God as one we should fear.

The fear of the Lord also leads to a life of holiness. New Testament. 2 Corinthians 7. It's all over the Bible, y'all. 2 Corinthians 7, verse 1.

Paul says, since we have these promises, that's the promise of God's presence, by the way. You should go back and read this for yourself. It's beautiful. Beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.

This is a new covenant now. So just in case you thought it was an old covenant thing and it's legalistic, Pascal's being legalistic, let me just point you to the New Testament. He said, holiness, we are to cleanse ourselves, he says, from everything that defiles, what is the word?

[28 : 36] Body and spirit. What you watch with your eyes and what you do with your body, what you allow your mind to dwell upon and fantasize about.

Paul says, cleanse yourselves of that. Deal with that stuff and turn away from that which defiles you. Why, he says, and you say, why?

Because you fear God. When we fear God, we deal with our sins and we don't make excuses for them or try to minimize them.

If they're pointed out, we go, oh, have mercy, oh Lord, on me, a sinner. Can I give you another beautiful one?

In Acts chapter 9. Here's a beautiful example how the fear of God shows up. After Saul becomes the apostle Paul.

[29 : 46] The church is described. The church that he attacked is described in Acts chapter 9, verse 31. So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up.

And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied. Did you catch it? The fear of the Lord.

The fear of the Lord led to the comfort of the church. As the people walked, lived in a sense of the greatness and glory and majesty and omnipotence and presence of Jesus, walking in the fear of the Lord, they experienced comfort from the Lord.

Because they had been under heavy burden. Saul was going, he was a terrorist until Jesus snatched him up. Family, the church, our church has been, is being hit and pruned.

And throughout this country, churches are being hit and pruned. And people are upset. And there's great pain and suffering. Throughout the country, pastors are leaving the pastors because of the heavy burden that the attacks, sometimes attacks, have put upon them in different ways.

[31 : 16] But listen, what we need as a church is to seek the fear of the Lord, walking in it so that we can know the comfort of the Spirit together.

I'll just say this briefly and quickly. There's a downside. The downside is not fearing the Lord. And if we, it's a description of people who fall into that category.

And it's not very flattering. You know this passage. Romans 3. Verse 10.

As it is written, none is righteous, no, not one. No one understands. No one seeks for God. All have turned aside. Together they have become worthless.

No one does good, not even one. Their throat is an open grave. They use their tongues to deceive the venom of ashes under their lips. In other words, they use their mouth to tear folk to smithereens.

[32 : 31] And their computers, too. Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. Bitterness defiles. Hebrews warns us that a root of bitterness can spring up among you as a church and defile many people.

Bitter people defile other people. Their feet are swift to shed blood. And they think they're doing God's will.

In their paths are ruin and misery. And the way of peace they have not known. Here's a summary statement. There is no fear of God before their eyes.

We don't talk about the fear of God, brothers and sisters. If we feared the Lord, we would treat one another better.

Because you're holy ground. And how I treat you means something.

[33 : 40] How I speak to you, how I use my words, how I use my computer, it speaks to you. It means something. You're holy ground. I can't treat you any old way because I got a beef or I got something I need to say.

I can't just do that. My tongue must be controlled under the spirit of God because why? I fear the Lord and my words have power. Not like the faith prosperity people say you can create your own reality.

No, I'm not talking about that. How you speak to your spouse. How you speak to your children.

Don't you understand the fear of the Lord leads to good ethics.

We do business right. Because we treat people right. Racism gets put down when we fear the Lord because we are humble ourselves.

There is no one better than the other. No race or ethnic or superior or inferior. When I fear God. That's why we had the stuff we have had in this country.

[34 : 49] Church was a part of it. Why? Because of all that theology, where was the fear of the Lord? Amen. Amen. Amen. Justice is done by God's people.

Not because it's written down on a piece of paper. We call it a mission statement. But because we fear the Lord. And we recognize he is holy and a God of justice.

And we cannot. But seek the welfare and the right treatment of all people. No matter what it costs us. Because we fear the Lord.

Why do we fear the Lord? Because of all these benefits. Jesus is the one who delighted in the fear of the Lord.

Jesus delighted. Our Savior delighted in the fear of the Lord. A prophecy was made of him. Isaiah chapter 11 verses 1 through 3.

[36 : 00] Here's the prophecy. There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse. And a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him.

The spirit of wisdom and understanding. The spirit of counsel and might. The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.

Jesse was the father of David. And that would come. The fruit that would come from David. Would be the greatest king Israel and the world had ever seen.

It's a prophecy of the Messiah. The one who would come. The Christ. And Jesus comes. And he walks. He lives. And he breathes. And rejoices. In the fear of the Lord.

Of his father. In his humanity. Jesus submitted himself to the will of the father. And showed us. Showed us.

[37 : 00] What it means to be fully human. And to walk with God. To do justice. To love mercy. And to walk humbly with God. Is to fear him.

And Jesus showed it to us. And then he died. Because he knew we couldn't do it. He knew we'd fail. And we had fail. And he died. And rose again from the dead.

That those who call him savior. That those who call him Lord. Watch this. That those who see his glory. Who recognize who he is.

The living son of God. God incarnate. God made flesh. That they would see him. And they would fall before him. Like John. Revelation chapter 1. When John the apostle saw Jesus.

He said I fell at his feet. As though I was dead. There. Is the fear of the Lord. When the last time you fell at Jesus feet.

[38 : 03] When the last time your heart was overwhelmed. With great thoughts about Jesus. He wants you to know him like that. Is that Jesus too small?

Is. Have we relegated God to this minor deity. Tribal deity. I don't know. Is he.

Has he lost his juice in our lives. His authority. His power. Do we take his ways lightly. I don't know. All I know is. I want this. I want him. I leave you with one last thought.

From Psalm 130. I leave you with the gospel. Again. The gospel. But look. I'm finding it in the Psalms. If you.

[39 : 12] O Lord. Should mark iniquities. O Lord. Who could stand. But with you. There is forgiveness. That you may be feared.

There's the gospel. Forgiveness only comes through Jesus. There's the gospel. Why does he forgive you of your sins?

Why does he cleanse us from unrighteousness when we cry out to him? Why? Why? Why? Why? Why? For his glory. That we might fear him.

That's why. That he would weigh heavy on us. His presence. Would be a presence where we are drawn to him in love.

Because he loves us. But at the same time we're drawn to Holy Father. Father. He's glorious and so much bigger. Like looking at the Grand Canyon and going wow.

[40 : 18] You look at God. You look at Jesus. And you go wow. And like Isaiah 66 says. We tremble at his word. Not that he's going to give us.

No. This is reverence. This is awe. This is my God. This is God. This is Jesus in his majesty. And he blows us away. And he loves us. And he knows us. He's omniscient.

He knows you. He's omnipotent. He sustains you. He holds you up. I mean. What? He does all that for you. Because of Jesus. With you. Because you are in Jesus. And he does it.

And he won't believe you. No forsake you. He will never turn his back on you. Listen. Listen. And all of it. So that you might fear him. And walk before him. And faith.

And love. Then maybe he'll get glory.

[41 : 16] In us. Will you pray? I forgot to tell you something. I'm sorry. I forgot to tell you. This is just some more practical stuff here.

How do we grow? Pray. Don't fear. Fear. Seek it. Psalm 86:11.

NIV. We pray this way. Teach me your way, O Lord. That I may rely on your faithfulness. Give me an undivided heart. That I may fear your name. Pray. Psalm 86:11.

Pray. Pray for it. Seek. God. Give me. Give us. Don't just pray for you. Pray for us. Two. Seek God's priorities.

Make them a part of your life. The apostles doctrine. The fellowship. The breaking of bread. The prayers. Make those a huge part of your life. Meditate.

[42 : 12] Three. Meditate on big biblical ideas about God. Look in the Bible. Study his holiness. He's not like you. Holiness. He's not like you. He's totally pure. Righteous.

He's majesty. He dwells in an unapproachable life. Let that blow your mind. Because now you are brought in through Jesus. His omnipotence.

His omnipresence. His omniscience. He knows you. Meditate on his great love. Big ideas about God. How is he sovereign? And yet things happen in this world that we can't explain that are so horrible.

Yet God is sovereign. Do you believe he's sovereign? Let that blow your mind. And lastly, act on his promises. Act on his word.

And watch him show up. Now that will blow your mind. Act on his word. Get in the game. Get off the bench. Lord, I trust you.

[43 : 14] Help me to walk worthy of the name of Jesus. In the fear of God. Father, bless your word to your people. Teach us the fear of the Lord.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.