

God is Ever Present

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[0 : 00] As we continue to think about what God is like this week, we come to the idea that God is omnipresent, that God is ever-present. We know the phrase, and we probably had the experience, that we can't be in two places at the same time.

But I guess there are probably times where you wished that you could be. Maybe perhaps there is a significant event, a wedding that clashed with some other important event, or you've got children and they're doing activities in different places and you wish you could see them both, but you can't. Sometimes we have those situations where we have to make decisions and we find our hearts wanting to be somewhere else perhaps while we know we need to be in this other place.

Because we can't be in two places at the same time. Although, I guess one of the things about modern technology is it's serving to push back the barriers quite a lot. You know, we can shop online, we can learn online, we can be connected to people all around the globe, we can keep up with multiple events in multiple venues on multiple pieces of technology.

And so, in some ways, we are, I guess, more connected than we ever have been. But if we find ourselves doing that regularly, we're probably also aware of that idea of becoming kind of divided selves, that we end up being distracted.

[1 : 31] We struggle to fully engage with anything because we're trying to be in all these different places. And sometimes it can be quite exhausting. It was interesting to me, I read recently that there's a growing trend among music artists to try and ban audiences from taking mobile phones out during concert performances now.

Because they want their audience to be fully present and fully engaged. And they're recognizing the difference between people just being there for the music and people being there so they can show on their Instagram that they were there.

The reality is, as we find it in the Bible, is that God connected our spirit and our bodies. And so, as a result of that, we're deliberately limited so that we can only be in one place at one time.

We can be contained. But by contrast, God is uncontainable. In John chapter 4, Jesus was speaking to the women from Samaria.

And he said to her that God is spirit. God is not bound by a body. Therefore, he can be fully present everywhere all of the time.

[2 : 50] And not in a divided way. So it's not like there's a bit of God over here and there's some of God over there. He's fully present everywhere. And Jesus said, God is spirit. And his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth.

And at least part of that was opening up this discussion to the women that there's not, here's the holy place or here's the holy place where God is to be worshipped. God is spirit so he can be worshipped anywhere and by anyone because God is everywhere.

Unlike us, God never finds himself being overstretched. God never finds himself being pulled into directions. As Jen Wilkin puts it, God, unbound by a body, is not limited to one place.

He is not merely big. He is uncontainable, able to be present everywhere. So that's what we're going to be thinking about this evening. And the plan is basically to use three Psalms that will be familiar to a number of us anyway.

We've sung them all today, Psalm 46 and 51 and 139, to build up something of a picture of this God who is ever present, who is always present.

[4 : 02] And to see how this helps us in our worship. See what influence this can have on our Christian lives. And also how this is helpful as we seek to help other people.

So we'll begin in Psalm 139 and we'll look at verses 7 to 10. And there perhaps the lesson we can draw is that because God is ever present, we should live humbly.

So this is a section where David the Psalmist is reflecting on this fact that God is ever present, all present. And that stands in stark contrast to David.

You find David imagining himself moving up and down and from one side to the other side. He knows he's limited. There needs to be movement. But what he's saying is God is not like that. And that's a source of comfort to David. So let's look at verse 7. Psalm 139. Where can I go from your spirit?

[5 : 02] Where can I flee from your presence? And the rest of it is a reflection on this fact that because God is a spirit, he is not limited by space.

There is no place David can go where God is not. As he begins to reflect in verses 8 and 9, he is reflecting on this fact that you and I can never and will never outrun God.

There are no secret places that we can go to that he has not discovered where he is not. If I go up to the heavens, you're there.

If I make my bed in the depths, you're there. Rise on the wings of the dawn or settle on the far side of the sea. No matter how mobile, no matter where life takes us, God will be there.

If we change the image slightly, if we imagine going to the furthest distances that we can see with the Hubble telescope or those smallest things that we can see with an electron microscope, God is there too.

[6 : 07] And he's there sustaining and knowing and guiding and loving his people. Now there's an important question for us in this. How does David feel about this fact that God is everywhere, that we can never escape God's presence?

You know, there's a lot of concern about Big Brother watching us and what the government does with kind of CCT imagery and the likes. But we don't find those concerns with David, do we?

In verse 10, having reflected on the fact that God is everywhere, he says, Even there your hand will guide me. Your right hand will hold me fast.

There is comfort in this reality. Like a child about to face a new experience or a difficult experience, David imagines himself being held by God's strong right hand.

God is there and that's good news. Because God is never overstretched, because God is ever present, he can give us the kind of peace and security that we need.

[7 : 21] And so this psalm is calling us to a humble worship, to recognize that while we are limited to one place at one time, God is not. And there is this encouragement from David to be glad that God sticks close to us.

Just as Jesus promised his followers, I am with you always to the very end of the age. This is who our God is. He is faithful to these promises. Faithful to be with and for his people.

And so there is an invitation to us to humbly trust him when we find ourselves in hard places, scary places, or new places and situations.

We can rest knowing that God is there and he is there for us. I think there is also an invitation for us to rest in that sense where there are some people in our lives that we are really concerned for.

And we know that they are going through difficult situations and sometimes we can't be there for them or with them. But we have a God who can and who does.

[8 : 34] And so part of our concern for other people is to bring them to God. To remember that God is there and God can help. There is also an encouragement to us, I think, in the contrast between us and God to humbly submit to our limits.

To give up this relentless and sometimes exhausting attempt to be in so many places at one time. Instead, to just resolve to be fully present in the present.

To have a conversation with someone without being distracted. To give ourselves to another person without thinking about what might be happening in some other part of the world.

Maybe we need to learn to go unplugged for our sake and for the sake of others. And I think for our faith there is certainly a call to us in the present to meditate on the reality of verse 10.

To live in that kind of humble trust that God who is Father, Son and Spirit is with us and he will guide us and he will hold us fast.

[9 : 44] So God is ever present, David says in Psalm 139. So we should live humbly. Now, turn with me to Psalm 51. Now we're going to skip back a few pages to Psalm 51.

Which is on page 573. This is the last psalm we just sung the first nine verses of. In Psalm 51 and especially the first four verses.

And we're going to think about this idea that God is ever present. So we should live carefully. The titles of the Psalms are important.

And this title for Psalm 51 gives us the occasion for the writing of this psalm. When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.

So God sends Nathan to confront David over what David seemed to think was the secret sin of adultery. He followed that up with having Uriah Bathsheba's husband killed.

[10:54] But you know when you stop and think even about that title. This is really remarkable because here is King David allowing this very personal confession of deep sin to become part of public worship.

Here is the king acknowledging before his people that I am guilty and I need to trust in God's grace and God's covenant faithfulness.

We'll see that's where he pins his hope in the opening verses that we'll look to. And we see it throughout his only hope. He understands this is that God would cleanse him.

That God would show grace and mercy to him. So here is a king who trusts absolutely in God's grace and God's faithfulness. And therefore he is able to confess freely.

Now the key idea for our topic this evening is in verse 4. Against you, you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.

[12:00] So here is David acknowledging that before God there is no such thing as secret sin. We may feel that we have secret sins in our lives.

Things that we would not dream of sharing with another person because of the shame that that would cause us. But the reality, as David points out to us, is there is no secret sin when it comes to God.

We can cover up with others, but we can't cover up before the ever-present God. Again, as Jen Wilkin puts it in her book, God is near whether we feel him to be or not.

How mindful we are of this truth will directly affect how we live. And this is what we see with David. Having had his sin pointed out, he recognizes that God is ever-present and he thinks about what his ever-present God is like.

[13:06] And in the first verse, we find that he trusts in the God of covenant. There's lots of covenant language in here.

Verse 1, Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love, according to your great compassion, blot out my transgressions.

Now those words, mercy, unfailing love, compassion, they're all drawn from God revealing his character to Moses in Exodus chapter 34. Moses wanted to see God's glory and God reveals it through revealing the kind of God that he is.

And David pins his hope on the character of this ever-present God, that he shows mercy, not dealing with him as his sin deserves, not instantly judging and condemning, that this God is marked by unfailing love.

And David finds hope that he will not be abandoned despite his failure. He is a God of great compassion. And his hope is that God will respond to his need by acting positively to help despite his sin.

[14:23] When this is our God, the God of the Bible, the God of grace, the God of the covenant, we are able to move towards him even in our sin.

He knows our sin. He's present when we sin. And yet he's provided the way for us to be forgiven of our sin by sending the Lord Jesus.

And so he is ready to forgive. And David appreciates this about his God. Why does David need God to act in mercy and unfailing love and compassion?

Because he knows clearly that all of his sin is committed when God is present with him. So while we have in our own hearts that sense of pride and shame, and there are people who we are desperate to be in their good books, and we're devastated to lose face when we fail, when we sin before them, and we apply that horizontally, and there are people that we do not disappoint, we can easily forget vertically that God deserves all of our honour, and that we should seek to obey knowing that he is present with us at all times.

Just as David relied on these three covenant qualities of God, so now he talks about his sin using a trio of different words. In verses 2 and 3, his language for sin, first of all, he says his sin is transgression.

[16:15] This idea of trespassing into forbidden territory. God says, here's the safe place, here's where you should live, and we trespass when we break God's law, when we go outside of that.

And then he says in verse 2, wash away all my iniquity. That's the idea of having that tendency to make straight things crooked, to pervert the straight way, and cleanse me from my sin.

Sin has the idea of our failure to hit the target, or falling short of the mark. God sets a standard, and we fail to achieve it.

And David knows this about himself, and he also knows that God sees it all. Which is why he says, not just my sin is always before me, in verse 3, against you, you only have I sinned.

God's law defines sin. God is the truly holy one. So all sin is, first of all, a sin against God.

[17:32] Though clearly, others feel the effects of sin, and the devastating consequences, as we see in the story of Bathsheba and Uriah.

And what does David want God to do about his sin? Having confessed it openly with his trio of words about his sin, he now uses a trio of washing words, washing images in verses 1 and 2.

So he says, blot out my transgressions. The idea of wiping the slate clean, of removing the words from the page, creating a blank page again.

Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. This is laundry image, of a stain and clothing being removed.

And so he's aware of what God is like, he's aware of what his sin is like, and he asks this God to deal with his sin according to his mercy and his love and his compassion.

[18:37] It gives him hope and confidence for forgiveness. And so he confesses his sin. Verse 3, I see my sin.

He's meditating, he's reflecting on it. And then in verse 4, he's acknowledging, you see all my sin. And so here is an encouragement to us to meditate on this fact.

God is ever present with us. When no one else is around, when no one else is looking, God is there. And that's not intended to be a scary thing, but it's rather an encouragement to live consciously in God's presence so that we would live carefully with regards to sin.

That we would live carefully in our obedience. And that we would worship him because we know, just as David knows, that there is a way for us, even in our sin, to be forgiven and to be cleansed because he sent Jesus to take all our sin, to make us clean, to make us acceptable in God's sight. So God is ever present. So we should live carefully. And one last Psalm, the Psalm that we began with, Psalm 46. Psalm 46 on page 570.

[20:05] Let's think about the opening and then the refrain that we find in verses 7 and 11. God is ever present.

Therefore we can live securely. As you work your way through the Psalm, you discover that it pictures a variety of different crises. Times of chaos are pictured in the Psalm.

So there's the forces of nature, that we find in verses 2 and 3. We find a city under siege in the middle section there, 4 to 6. And then we find national warfare, enemies coming against the nation in verses 8 to 10.

And this Psalm is saying, we can face disasters without fear when we have found true security in God alone. And the Psalm goes on to explain why and how that's possible.

It's possible because God is, according to verse 1, our refuge, the safe place to run to. Think Edinburgh Castle under siege.

[21:15] Run up the mountain, hide in the castle, and there's safety. Sometimes God is present to shield us from trouble. That's sometimes how God chooses to work.

He protects his people. He is a refuge for us. And then at other times, he is our strength. He gives us inner strength.

He's present with us in the middle of our trouble to give us help and strength when we need it.

Sometimes he shields us. Sometimes he doesn't. But in every case, he's ever present to help us in our trouble.

So that's true all the time. We have a God who's with us and for us in our troubles. Which is good news. And it's good news when David explains to us what our God is like.

Verse 7 and 11 repeat these truths about God. The Lord Almighty is with us. The God of Jacob is our fortress.

[22:20] God is the Lord Almighty, the God of absolute strength. This is who we trust in. And he's also the God of Jacob, which pulls us back to the covenant, to the fact that he's a God of grace.

He's a God who's faithful to his covenant promises towards his own people. And so what the sons of Korah and their psalm are saying, since this God is with us, there is no need for us to be overwhelmed.

When trouble comes, and trouble will come, the question is not simply, do I have faith? But who or what do I have faith in?

Is the person, is the thing that I am trusting in strong enough to keep me in this particular situation? Can it meet all my needs and give me true and lasting security?

And what the psalmist is saying is that only when we know God, only when our hope is in Jesus, can we truly say, yes, in all cases, that source of trust is reliable.

[23 : 29] Because he's the almighty God, the all-powerful God, who's also the God of covenant grace. I discovered this week that the hymn writer John Wesley, when he was on his deathbed, when he was, like me, almost unable to speak, two times he summoned his strength and he got up from his bed and he called out, the best of all, God is with us.

The best of all, God is with us. When we look to care for people, when we look to bring comfort to those who are hurting, when we look to encourage those who are distressed, the best thing we can do is introduce them to the God who is with us.

Introduce them to the God who is Emmanuel. That we would entrust them to God's care and that we would point them to the God who is with them and for them to care for them.

to invite them to place themselves in God's strong hands. So when trouble comes, here is a wonderful verse and a wonderful truth for us to rely on.

God is our refuge and strength and ever-present help in trouble. Martin Luther, when the church was persecuted and under attack, would often go to this psalm to sing Psalm 46 to give him hope and encouragement.

[25 : 03] For our worship, as we remember, Jesus came to be Emmanuel, to be God with us. This is good news. And we look forward to the future hope of fully experiencing that.

when God is with us and we are with God and we get to see him and we get to know him. But in the present, here is this invitation to live securely because the Lord Almighty is with us.

The God of Jacob is our fortress.