

Three Experiences of God

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Preacher: Harry Robinson

- [0 : 0 0] In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. You will see a brief letter from me in the bulletin this morning, and in it I want to urge heavily upon you the gift of hospitality, and I've outlined that in the letter, and hope you will read it.
- I was in Germany not long after the war, and everybody's house was entered by the civic authorities because there was a terrible housing shortage.
- The square footage of each house was recorded, and there had to be as many people living in that house as their square footage granted. And I would like not the civic authorities, but the Holy Spirit to do that with our houses and so that we might open our hearts and homes to people who from time to time want to come and be part of this congregation and this community.
- Second thing is Jim Glennon, Canon Jim Glennon, who for 25 years has been in the Ministry of Healing, particularly in the Cathedral, I think in Sydney, Australia.
- He'll be our preacher next Sunday morning. And I'm anxious that we should hear him. And the third thing I want to say is that on Tuesday, we have reserved Rosemary Heights, which is, I guess it's a nunnery, down in White Rock.
- [1 : 4 4] And we have it from 9 till 4, and a few of us are going down to pray and have a quiet day together, particularly focused on this matter of healing, which has come to the fore in my thinking through in recent days.
- And I just would invite any of you who might like to join us to let me know. And if the ministry announcements are over, I will now preach the sermon.
- You may have, we've read three lessons this morning, and I want to touch on all three of them. Isaiah 6, Romans 8, and John 3.
- This is the time when film festivals are popular in all over the world, and even in Vancouver. And one of the great joys of film festivals is that you go and sit through some foreign film, read the subtitles, and then suddenly the credits at the end of the film come up, and you wonder what happened, and where you got lost.
- And that may happen to you in the course of a film festival. It also happens to a lot of people in the course of church. People start going out and they wonder where they got lost.
- [3 : 1 3] And the point of what was going on. So I want to show you three experiences of God, which are illustrated in the scripture this morning, which I trust will be part of your experience as you are at church this morning.
- During the course of a week, I run into people who are sick, people who are depressed, people who are going through traumatic relationship changes of one kind and another, people who are depressed and discouraged and downhearted, people who are chronically ill, people who are acutely ill, people who are in various stages of real need.
- And I'm very anxious that we should, as a congregation, be able to support and encourage and help them. I even heard of somebody who was too unhappy to come and join us for the barbecue on Friday night because there were so many happy people there.

Well, they weren't all that happy, but they had a good time, I hope. But somehow the infection of the salvation which God has given us in Christ needs to touch all our lives in some way.

And I want this morning service to be a powerful healing service for all of you. One of the things which I've come up against in sort of being presented with this matter of healing is the recognition that most of my ills, I kind of press down and pretend they're not there and try and deal with them that way.

[5 : 02] And it's wonderful the catalog of ills and complaints you can come out with if you think there's some possibility of them being healed. And so I hope that in the course of the service this morning, you will, in kneeling before God, bring out all those broken relationships, all those causes of depression, all the guilt that you feel, that you will, in a sense, spread them out before God, that he may, by his spirit, touch and heal you.

And that we may not only be concerned for ourselves, but we may pray for one another, that God will wonderfully meet all of us in this service this morning.

That's hard to say to you people, because you're all looking very doubtfully at me. As though to say, orthodoxy demands, Harry, that you don't say that kind of thing.

You're being silly if you think my problems would be dealt with that easily. And I feel a lot of weight from you, that you don't want to get involved in that too much.

To know that it's possible, maybe if we go home with that feeling, we've done all we can do. But to know that it's happened to us, that God has forgiven us, that God has renewed us, that God has saved us, that God indwells us by his Holy Spirit.

[6 : 46] I'm afraid that there is no way of getting out of the fact that we all should go home with that awareness. That awareness not only in our heads, but in our hearts, and perhaps in the whole of our bodies.

I want to show you these three encounters with God, to show you how, in a sense, magnificent the encounter with God is, that is, in a sense, latent in this service.

And I trust may become real to you through this service. 1 Isaiah, in chapter 6. 1 Isaiah, in chapter 6. And there you have, in the year that King Uzziah died, I beheld the Lord high and lifted up.

And this is a tremendous picture of God, infinitely superior to us. And he is surrounded around with seraphims, with angels.

And smoke fills the temple. His train fills the temple. And the angels cry out, as we did this morning in our first hymn, Holy, holy, holy.

[8 : 01] This morning, in the wee hours of the morning, with a cup of only lukewarm tea on my desk, as I was looking through the scriptures, I reached out to get a book that was in front of me, and the tea spilled all over my Bible, all over my notes, all over my desk, and started running down on me.

And I said, Damn, damn, damn. All to myself. Well, that's exactly the opposite of Isaiah's vision of God, in which he says, Holy, holy, holy.

He was awed completely by the absolute holiness of God. He was completely filled with that.

And when Isaiah saw it, he said, Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.

And God sends an angel with a hot coal, and touches Isaiah's lips, and says, Your guilt is taken away, and your sin is forgiven.

[9 : 26] And there you have one picture of our worship, where we bow down before the transcendent holiness of God. And so caught are we by the vision that we can't do any more than echo Isaiah's words, Woe is me.

And God reaches out and meets us. And our guilt is taken away, and our sin is forgiven. That reality belongs to you and me, here and now. The second picture is the picture of Nicodemus, in John chapter 3.

Now, in the first picture, God is a transcendent God, surrounded by holiness and angels and smoke, and it's a tremendous picture. In this picture, man, as Nicodemus, is the great man, the member of the Sanhedrin, the leader of his community, a first citizen among that first nation, of all the nations of the world, the chosen people of God, and he is a great, great man, steeped in the scriptures, and fully aware of all the history of the people of God.

And God comes to him as a teacher, a homeless teacher, wandering through Palestine, and teaching and performing miracles.

[11 : 08] And because of his great importance, as a man, he comes to, Nicodemus comes to Christ, by night, so that he won't upset the delicate social balance, whereby it would be an unthinkable thing, for a man of his importance, a man of his stature, a man of his significance in the community, to come before this itinerant teacher, and to ask him questions, when he himself should be the one who has all the answers.

And so man, in the person of Nicodemus, comes before the God who is, in a sense, despised, forsaken, and rejected.

It's a very different picture, isn't it? And yet, God meets Nicodemus, in Jesus, and tells him, ah, you must be born again.

Ah. The whole idea that his whole life has to have a radically new beginning. A beginning which is not the pinnacle of human attainment, but a beginning which is the rock-bottom foundation of God's intervention in our lives, in healing and saving, and re-establishing us in his kingdom.

You must be born again. And Nicodemus says, how can these things be? Because he finds in himself an enormous resistance.

[12 : 50] The whole way he's learned to think the whole of his life, finds it very difficult to come to grips with this simple dictum, that you must be born again.

That the reality of the kingdom of God depends upon you. That in repentance and faith, you come to new birth in Christ.

There is a powerful picture from yesterday's Globe and Mail. It talks about the fighter pilots training at Cold Lake, Alberta, and flying the new Canadian fighter plane, the CF-18.

And it tells about an early accident in which one young pilot took this plane, which is a miracle of automation and computers, and he flew it.

And they say he impacted with the ground at a 90-degree angle, which is the happy language of modern technology.

[14 : 02] We cover something of the grim reality of the vacation. And they suspected that it was some kind of fault in the machinery of the plane.

And then they discovered that the fault was in the pilot and that he had what they described as a strange disease called magic fixation.

And that is that one fact about where he was in that plane, traveling at many hundreds of miles an hour, he was obsessed with one reading from the machinery and had lost really where he was at.

And so he didn't even know what was happening. That magic fixation is now one of the things that they have to be very careful to train pilots about.

They said that it used to be called instrument fixation. And it's something that happens to the mind of a pilot, so he loses a sense of reality about where he is.

[15 : 09] And that's a very dangerous condition. Well, maybe you don't have instrument fixation, but maybe you have TV fixation.

You don't know exactly where you are. And you are on a very dangerous course indeed, and God confronts you as Jesus confronted Nicodemus and says it is critically important for you to be born again, to come to new life through faith in Jesus Christ.

the fixation that has taken hold of your mind will be the basis of your destruction unless you get hold of that reality about where you are and where you're going which comes from faith in Jesus Christ you may think that an over dramatic illustration but the reality I think is there and in escaping what is happening is not what you think is happening our minds have fixed on a little piece of information and excluded the whole purpose of God the transcendent and holy God who made himself known to Isaiah and to Nicodemus the third encounter which we get in the scriptures this morning is the one from Romans chapter 8 and verses 12 to 17 and it gives a picture there now it's not located as Isaiah was in the temple it's not located at night where Nicodemus meets with Jesus in Jerusalem it's now a kind of spiritual encounter in which Paul looks into his own heart and sees the consequences of his encounter with the living God and he makes these discoveries and I'll just recite them for you he said of you and me and of us

I am not a debtor to the flesh you know that the gratification of our flesh is not the ultimate debt that has to be paid another drink another helping another sensual delight another drug fix we are not to live as the debtors to our flesh because that way leads to death we are to be given the spirit of sonship so we are not debtors but sons to whom a great inheritance is promised and the witness of the presence of that Holy Spirit in our hearts and lives is that from our hearts we cry Abba Father even as Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane cried out to his father in the midst or in the sense almost in the height of his earthly distress and said

Abba Father let this cup pass from me nevertheless not my will but thy will be done and that tension which Christ exhibited when he was faced with this contradiction in his own life and he cried out to the father and so we are to cry out to God as our father who has given us his Holy Spirit so that his Holy Spirit bears witness with ours when we cry out to him Abba Father we are the children of God we are indwelt by his Spirit his Spirit brings to the surface the deepest longings of our own hearts when we are able to cry to join with the witness of the Spirit in crying

[19 : 35] Abba Father so our encounter with God God as Father in his holiness ultimately more than we are infinitely more than we are we meet God in Jesus Christ who confronts us with the solemn reality of our situation and says the reality of the kingdom demands new birth we meet God in the person of the Holy Spirit who by his witness in our hearts brings to the surface of our lives the deepest longing and that deepest longing is recognized and acknowledged when from our hearts rather than cry out woe is me like Isaiah we can by the witness of the Spirit cry out Abba Father so the reality of our experience this morning is to know the blessing of God the Father

Almighty whom we cry holy holy holy the realism of God the Son who says with respect to the kingdom of God you must be born again and the internal witness of the Holy Spirit that can identify you as a child of God and who can be the presence of God in the center of your life guiding directing confirming strengthening and keeping you we encounter God in his holiness God in his word become blessed God in his indwelling spirit in us