

Practicing the Presence

How to make our Heavenly Father real in the melee of everyday life

"The Joyous Discovery of the Omnipresence of God" -I

Dr. Desmond Ford

From time-to-time we feel as barren and as fruitless as Aaron's rod before it budded (Numbers 17).

We sometimes feel as empty as the widow's cruse of oil (1 Kings 17), as desperate as sinking Peter (Matthew 14), as frustrated as the disciples who fished all night and took nothing in their nets (Luke 5).

This is common, recurring, human experience. But is it necessary?

There is One who overcame the world, and who said,

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20 RSV)

True religion and God

True religion is eternal life lived in the midst of time. True religion is lived by the power of, and in the company of, God. The one reason for your existence and mine is that we might be temples of the living God. That is why we are here.

The original sin that brought upon us all our woe was when man tried to be independent of God. "You will be like God" said the devil (Genesis 3:5). Independence of God is the great original sin.

But a fish might as well try to live without water and a bird without air as you and I might try to live without God. God is meant to be to us what the sun is to the earth—a source of life and light and joy and health. God is all of that. To live without God is madness, the greatest of folly.

God's Spirit is with us

When our Lord Jesus rose from the dead, he breathed upon his disciples and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22). By so doing, he was saying, "Because of the cross, you need never walk alone. Because of the cross, I have brought the omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient God to dwell alongside you—and inside you—now and forever."

You see, the coming of the Spirit is the coming of God. Jesus said, "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you" (John 14:8 KJV). When he breathed upon his disciples the Holy Spirit, he was saying, "Because of Calvary, you need never live at your own expense, at your own charge." We don't have much in the way of resources. A few bacteria—a million of which could dance on the head of a pin—can fell us in a moment. We are at the mercy of any drunk driver on the highway or freeway.

*Though
life can sometimes feel
empty, we are not alone.
True religion is lived
in the company of God.
Although we are sinners, because of
Christ's cross, the Spirit of God is
with us. The omnipresence of
God fills our lives.*

We need God. Everything you and I see is transient. Everything we feel, taste, touch—everything—is temporary. We raise a mirror, and it's temporary, but what's reflected in the mirror is more temporary.

John Wesley's sadness

The ultimate sadness of life is that nothing lasts. The beauty, the strength, the youth doesn't last. The vigor of mid-life is temporary. When John Wesley was 87, just before giving one of his last sermons, the congregation was singing a hymn written by his brother Charles. The hymn was about Jacob wrestling at Jabbok.

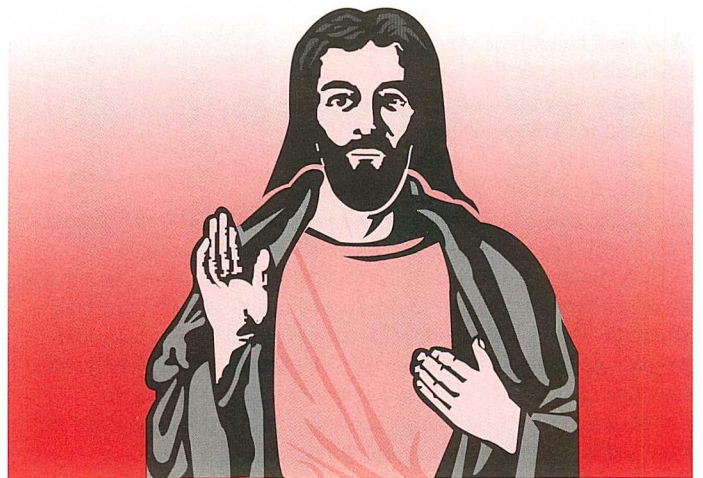
You remember, Jacob had sent all of his family ahead of him in little groups to try and placate his angry brother (as he supposed), Esau. Jacob was alone at night,

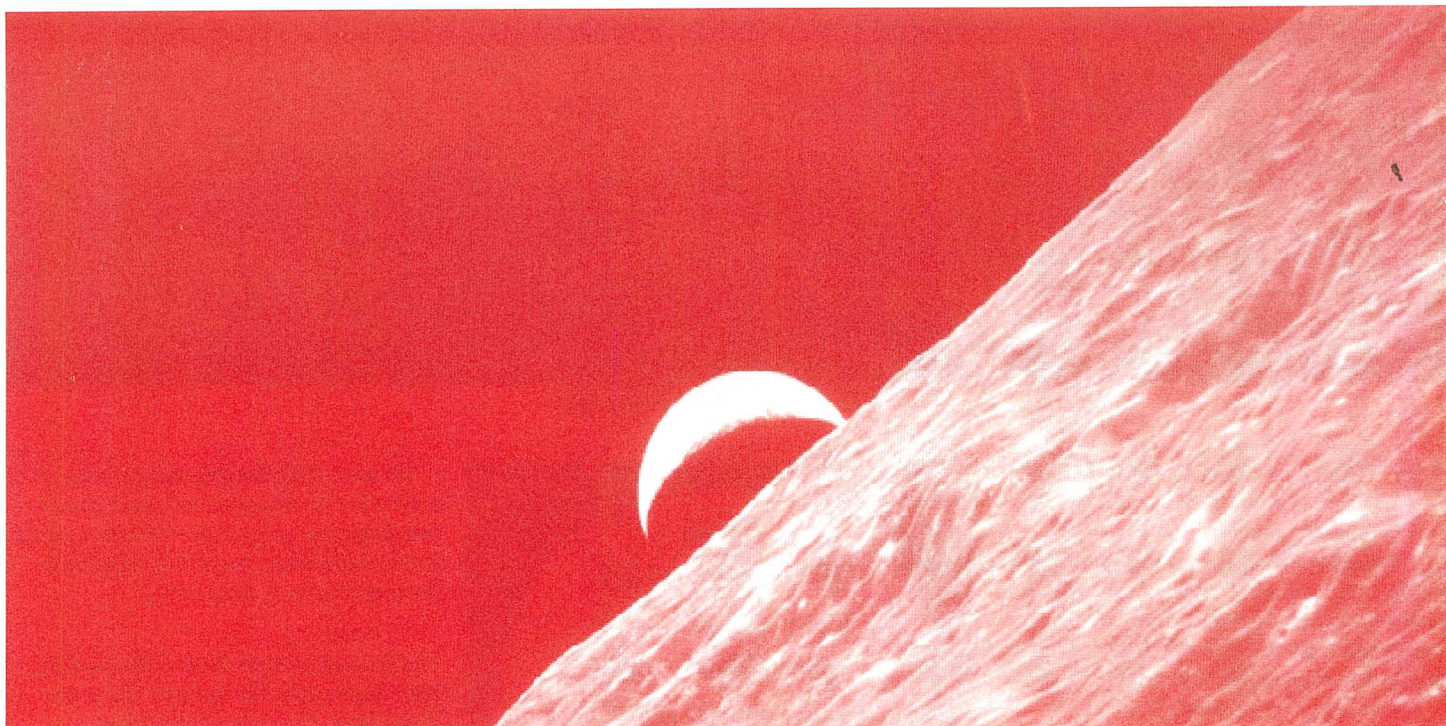
and wrestled with the angel.

The congregation was singing the beautiful hymn of Charles Wesley, and they came to the line where Jacob says, "My company before has gone, and I am left alone with Thee." And here's John Wesley, who had lost his brother just a short time before. Most of the men who had been John's contemporaries in the ministry were dead. Not many of them lived until 90, though John nearly did.

As he thinks of the loss of his brothers and his sisters and his companions in the ministry—and how he seemed to be a lonely tree on a wind-swept hilltop—he's overwhelmed with emotion. The old preacher suddenly sits down and covers his face with his hands.

But only for a moment. Then he stood up and finished the hymn with the congregation.





Trying to buy Immortality

"My company before has gone, and I am left alone with Thee."

My friends, if you and I had the very best we could hope for, that would be our story. Because nothing is abiding. Everything is temporary. Because of that, people try all sorts of chloroform masks to blot out the awareness that "it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). So people search madly for possessions, for pleasure, and for power.

Tennessee Williams's play, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, has Big Daddy showing his son a downstairs room full of stuff. The son who has just come home asks, "What's all this?"

"Boy, your mother buys stuff everywhere she goes. She thinks she's buying immortality," answers Big Daddy.

We all do it to some degree. Subconsciously, we try one thing after another in our effort to buy immortality. Tennyson said, "Many things have been taken but much remains." Life is a shrinking island.

Christ the remedy

The remedy? Jesus gave it on his last earthly night with his disciples. He said, "You shall behold me. And because I live, you shall live also. For if a man love me, he'll keep my words. And I'll abide with him, and my Father will abide with him." (See John 15).

That's the answer. We are not meant to live on our own. To live on our own is blasphemy. It is the greatest folly—and the most natural folly—of which we are capable.

F. W. Boreham, the British–Australian Baptist preacher, said that if he could have his ministry to do all over again—and he lived until about 95—he would preach more about God. "I should have told people more about what God is like. Not only that God is holy, not only that God is love, but that God knows everything (that's omniscience), that God can do everything (that's omnipotence), and that God is everywhere (that's omnipresence)."

Omnipresence of God

The omnipresence of God doesn't mean that God is spread out thin, as though there's a little slim sliver of divinity here, there and everywhere. No, no. The omnipresence of God means that God is **fully present in every place**. This is the teaching of Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation.

That is why Jacob—awakening one night long before the incident at Jabbok we just mentioned—when he saw the heavens open and a ladder let down, said, "Surely the Lord is in this place; and I did not know it. . . . How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of Heaven" (Genesis 28:16–17 RSV).

My friends, say that about your kitchen, your bedroom, your workshop, your office, your car—"Surely the Lord is in this place! This is none other than the house of God and the gate of prayer!" You may be walking along a beach or through the woods, you may seem to be in lonely isolation. No! No! God is in this place! This is the house of God. This is the gate of heaven.

Walking and talking with God

Enoch learned this truth, and that is why Scripture says he walked with God (Genesis 5:24). Then we have that strange line: "And he was not, for God took him" (Genesis 5:24 RSV).

A stark, simple account. If it had been altogether fictional, it wouldn't have read like that. The narrative would have made a big deal about it.

Enoch so knew the omnipresent God that he walked with God. Like Abraham, the friend of God. Like Moses, who talked to God face-to-face (Exodus 33:11). My friends, these are Old Testament worthies. Our privileges are much greater. The Holy Spirit moved in Old Testament times, but not to the same degree and power as has been possible since Christ's atonement at Calvary.

True religion is eternal life lived in the midst of time. True religion is lived by the power of, and in the company, of God. The one reason for your existence and mine is that we might be temples of the living God. That is why we are here.