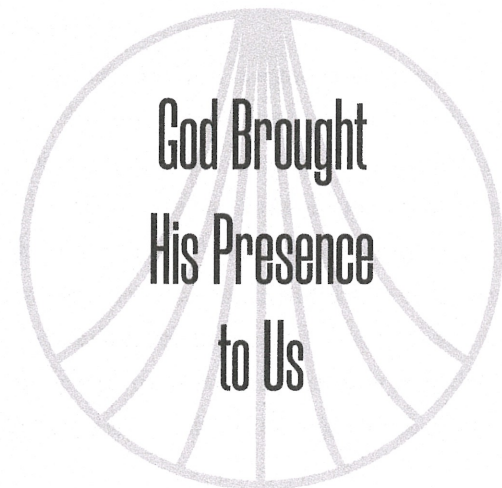


this today is an indication of His continued pursuit of you. He's calling now. Why would you not respond to this gracious invitation?

*Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling,
 Calling for you and for me;
 See, on the portal He's waiting and watching,
 Watching for you and for me.
 Come home, come home,
 Ye who are weary come home;
 Earnestly, tenderly, Jesus is calling;
 Calling, O sinner, come home!³⁷*

³⁷Will T. Thompson, "Softly and Tenderly," 1880.

CHAPTER 4 DWELLING



THE GRANDEST TALES, tell of warriors and kings who came to rescue others just at the critical hour. Some of these are fables; others are true accounts of selfless exploits and courageous liberations. But there is no story that rivals this one. All others are but a shadow of what C.S. Lewis called “the true myth,” i.e., the greatest story in history, that seems mythologic in its supernatural proportions but is actually true.

Since our fall into sin, God has gone to incredible lengths to call us to return to His presence. But only an intervention from heaven could make our return to Eden a reality.

Jesus left heaven to take the form of a man and do what was necessary to make living in God’s presence possible for us. His purpose in descending to earth was to return sinful men and women, forgiven and made acceptable through His sacrifice, to God’s presence. He came briefly to be with us so we could eternally be with Him. And He showed us, in flesh and blood, what being with the Father is like.

The Divine Humiliation

When God wanted to teach us what humility was in its purest form, He pointed to His Son’s choice to leave heaven and take on human flesh.

Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being

found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.³⁸

There could never be a more sacrificial decision than Christ choosing to inhabit the womb of a virgin girl as a one-cell organism. Facing the confines of a human body in a hostile environment, He came to dwell with us in human flesh, and we saw His presence as never before.

And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.³⁹

This was the greatest manifestation of His presence. We could physically see Him. We could hear Him speak, watch Him respond, feel His love and grace, and observe Him under the vilest temptations of the enemy and the constant persecutions from a hostile world.

John leaned on his breast. Mary washed His feet with her hair. His mother birthed, fed, and clothed him. His adversaries taunted Him, spat on Him, and beat Him.

We watched Him with His family, closest friends, and harshest enemies. The apostle John describes the realities of His presence with us ... realities that make our joy complete!

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life—and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the

³⁸Philippians 2:5-8

³⁹John 1:14

Father and was manifested to us—what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete.⁴⁰

Every moment of His three decades on earth convinces us that He wanted to be with us. This manifestation of His presence accomplished multiple results that could have happened no other way.

We Saw the Beauty of His Presence

What could be more attractive, what could call us to return to God more than watching Jesus in human flesh every day? He loved the outcasts. He healed the blind, the lame, and the sick. He valued women, which was uncommon in His day. He loved children with perfect tenderness. He challenged men to the noblest adventure.

He cared for those who were ignored and unseen. He even loved His enemies. He was never in a hurry but always on time. He was never fearful because His Father was speaking to Him as He moved in unceasing prayer. He was never selfish or self-seeking. In this one man who lived in perfect union with the Father, all the attributes of the perfect God-love described in 1 Corinthians 13 and the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5 came fully alive.

He was always at rest because He knew who He was, He knew who the Father was, and He was secure in the presence of God. He slept in a small boat through a terrifying storm. Before Pilate, who said, "Don't you know who I am and what I can do?" Jesus fearlessly replied, "You

⁴⁰1 John 1:1-4

don't know my Father and what He is doing." Nothing could touch Him, nothing could disturb Him, and nothing could destroy Him.

He was the ultimate model of a Presence-centered life. Perfect submission, perfect faith, perfect obedience, perfect abiding, perfect rest. He carried the optimum balance of unwavering truth and tender grace.

His beauty—the presence of God in human flesh—draws us to Him. We find ourselves loving Him because He first loved us. We want to be with Him because He first wanted to be with us.

We Felt What It was Like to Live in His Manifest Presence

God's consistent invitation is to draw near to Him and He will draw near to us. Yet, we wonder if this is possible, and if so, what it would be like. Is it best to pursue His presence? To draw near? To do what is necessary to live a Presence-centered life?

As we observe Jesus in human flesh, we see that nothing could be more beneficial, nothing more valuable. What could be better than talking to the One who has perfect wisdom? Who had it better than Peter, James, John, Mary, Martha, Mary Magdalene, and others who were *with* Him—the One who was always righteous, always kind, always holy?

The disciples in Jesus' day were lifted to the greatest heights of living, purpose, and adventure, which they would never have experienced without being near Him. Jesus showed us that *in His presence* is the best place to be.

We Became the Recipients of His Grace

And then, in the perfect time and way, we watched Him surrender to the hands of His enemies and go to the cross in our place. There, the

Father placed the sins of the world upon Him, so one perfect Man could pay the penalty of sin for the many. He pleaded with the Father to find another way if possible but still surrendered fully to the Father's will. On the cross, His sacrifice satisfied the just demands of a righteous God for our transgressions. He paid the penalty so we would be spared.

This payment would have never been paid, of course, unless He had come to dwell with us—brought His presence to earth—and died for us as a man.

This ultimate humiliation and sacrifice flowed from His heart and the Father's for one purpose: that we could be with Him eternally. It was not a plot to fill a storyline or an act to make God look extraordinary (He was already all of that). It was the needed step to bring us back into His presence. And the resurrection of Christ sealed the reality. It meant that we could be in the presence of the Father and the Living Son.

God's presence is our greatest need. All our loss, sin, and darkness have come from our separation from His presence. And all our gain, righteousness, and light come when we return to His presence.

Christ's incarnation should convince us that our presence with Him is God's great desire. His Son was willing to come and take us there.

We Beheld the Father

After the resurrection, a confused disciple said, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us," to which Jesus replied, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father."⁴¹ If you still have doubts about the character of the Father, the reality of His pursuit of us, and the value

⁴¹John 14:8-9

of pursuing Him, just look at Jesus. If you live in God's presence, that is what you will experience, and God Himself will ultimately conform you to the image of His Son, the image He planned for you from the beginning.

Jesus' physical presence brought to us something that couldn't be accomplished any other way. But amazingly, there was another chapter that would follow His earthly life—another extension of the Father's pursuit as He invited us to be with Him.

CHAPTER 5 INDWELLING

