

## “Life in the Spirit: The Lost Presence of God”

Text: selected

5-14-17



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**Reflection questions...** [please consider the teaching notes, first, as a basis of your reflections]

Charles Taylor (philosopher),

“... we live *inside an immanent frame*”, meaning that we see the world as physical and natural, without a trace of the super-natural.

*“Within this framework, how might we as humans be prone to understand ourselves? Each other? If we aren’t looking outside of ourselves to discover ‘who’ we are and ‘why’ we are, where will discover the answers?”*

Perhaps it might be good to dialogue around Paul’s understanding of the Holy Spirit in these (3) related concepts: 1) Spirit and New Covenant, 2) “indwelling”, 3) temple imagery.

- 1) New Covenant: Jeremiah 31:31-33: “*new heart (spirit) to replace heart of stone*” (Ezekiel 36:26, 27). 2 Corinthians 3:1-6, “inscribed by the Spirit of the living God...” This is nothing other than God’s own Spirit, enabling us to actually follow in his ways.
- 2) “indwelling”: the Spirit is spoken of as being “in/with” us. 1 Thess. 4:8; Eph.5:18. This takes on the language of *tabernacling*. This answers the question as to what happens if we no longer have the Law as a means of determining righteousness.
- 3) “temple”: 1 Cor.3:16; 2 Cor.6:16; Eph.2:22. Here is how the living God is now present with and to his people, and to the world: “*by templing in us*”. It is the means by which we are “led by the Spirit”.

*“How have you experienced the profound impact of another’s ‘absence’?”*

*“Are we actually the place of God’s perceivable presence? Is the presence of God with us what distinguishes our lives or do they simply view us as people with a few different God-hobbies?”*

*“Can others find life in us? Are we making God accessible to others? Are we helping to remove barriers/obstacles and reconciling others to God?”*

*“Are we interacting with others in ways which are welcoming? Are we helping to re-integrate people into the community for which they were designed?”*

*“Are others finding in us a place of love, sacrifice, healing, and forgiveness?”*

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## Teaching Notes...

### **Nothing makes us more aware of presence than absence.**

Ask anyone who has experienced the death of someone they love (perhaps even the death of marriage or significant relationship), in which they found the beloved, “absent”, to them. There is no substitute: not pictures, not FaceTime, not momentos. We need presence.

“**presence**”- in the original language, it means, *“to be in the face of (face to face with) another; to whom you might turn”*

Presence communicates our rugged commitment to be “**with**” the other. It’s a “with-ness” that is solidified in our being “**for**” the other. Advocacy. Being for the other is always a forward-looking posture (desires/dreams for them), which we would characterize as being “**toward**” something.

*“Emmanuel, God with (unto, toward, as long as, beside, in spite of) us...”* Matthew 1:23

*“If God is for us, ... can anything separate us from his love?”* Romans

*“... his mighty power at work within us to accomplish infinitely more than we could ask or imagine...”* Ephesians 3

It is the amalgamation of the being “with” and the being “for” that allows the other to internalize the commitment--- to be secure enough in love--- to risk transformation... the “toward”. It’s the essence of “covenant”. Anything else feels like rejection or coercion.

Whatever else the Jewish people believed to be true of themselves, they believed that they were “people of the Presence”.

*“For your presence among us sets your people and me apart from all other people on the earth”.* Exodus 33:15-16 [Moses]

“**Presence**” actually provides book-ends to the Story. In Genesis 2-3, God is present to and for his image-bearing creation. Revelation 21-22, God is now “at home” with his people in new creation.

### **Tracing the movements of God: Garden, Mt. Sinai, Tabernacle, Temple, Exile, Jesus, Us (Pentecost).**

#### **Garden**

*“When the cool evening breezes were blowing, the man and his wife heard the Lord God walking about in the garden”.* Genesis 3:8

This environment was delightful (lit. definition of Eden). The interaction and exchange between God and humanity was so normative and comfortable that it is depicted as “long walks together”. So comfortable that it was actually, “clothing optional” 😊.

#### **Sinai...**

*“Moses climbed the mountain to appear before God. The Lord called to him from the mountain and said, ‘Give these instructions to the family of Jacob... I will come to you in a thick cloud...”*

Exodus 19:3, 9

*“I will be your God, and you will be my people”.* Exodus 6:7 [This is the kind of God I am, so this is the kind of people you should be.]

## Tabernacle

*“Then, let them make a dwelling place for me... I will dwell among them..”* Exodus 25:8

Between the instructions and the actual construction comes the debacle in the desert (golden calf: *“Uh, Moses, don’t look now, but the encampment looks like a frat house”*).

*“You are so stubborn and rebellious. If I were to travel with you, even for a moment, I would destroy you”* (Exodus 33:5). Travelling together is just hard on relationships! Friends rarely survive vacations together.

Since relationships are always dynamic, God needed to remain mobile. God, apparently, enjoys “glamping”! The tent of meeting was both portable and ornate.

The Israelites followed the architectural prints to a “tee” and “then the cloud covered the Tabernacle and *“the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle”*. Exodus 40

## Temple

Israel is now out of the desert. What started as a portable home for God, is now a brick and mortar location.

*“Solomon prayed, ‘O, Lord,... now I have built a glorious temple for you, a place where you can live forever”*. 1 Kings 8:12

At the grand-opening, there was a work-stoppage amongst the priests because *“the presence of the Lord filled the Temple”*.

## Exile

Israel turns away from the worship of YHWH, toward other gods and God leaves the building (Ezekiel 10). Even then, God started some rumors with the prophets about his return.

*“I will put my Spirit in you, and you will live again... I will make my home among them. I will be their God and they will be my people”*. Ezekiel 37:13, 27; Malachi 3:1

## Jesus

*“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling (to live in a tent or tabernacle) among us”*.

John 1

This body which Jesus inhabited was actually filled with the Presence of God. He as a walking, talking, laughing, eating, temple. As the representative human being, he is what we are supposed to be.

## Us

*“What you see is what was predicted long ago by the prophet Joel: ‘In the last days’, God says, ‘I will pour out my Spirit upon all people...’* Acts 2:16-17

**Pentecost** (50 days after Passover)... Feast of Weeks. It was a festival celebrating, not only the harvest, but the giving of the Law and the promise of God’s return to the Temple.

The Law was paradoxical, in that, it was valued as God’s ethical dreams for his people, but it also created this huge “gap” between who we are and who were meant to be, because the law could merely point out our weakness and brokenness, but it could not empower us to realize a preferred-future.

In Acts 1, Jesus is taken up into heaven but, like Moses, he comes down with a covenant (promise), but this is a “new covenant”- written not on tablets of stone, but on human hearts.

The Holy Spirit is none other than the promise to Jeremiah and Ezekiel that God would “*breath on us*” (John 20: as with Adam) and that we would “live”. That he would “*write his laws on our hearts*” by indwelling us and immersing us fully into the life of God, with his desires and his passions and his will.

1 Corinthians 3:16 “*Don’t you know...*”

When Paul, a Jewish rabbi steeped in the narrative, said the word “**temple**”, he had one, clear image in mind. Those hearing him would have been inclined to understand it, as such: an actual structure located in Jerusalem and still standing at the time that Paul writes this letter.

The Temple, according to ancients, was “*sacred space*”. It was where “God’s space” and “our space”, intersected. In it, was a “thin-veil”, literally and metaphorically. There was not much standing between us and the “other” (transcendent).

**The point is clear: those in whom the Spirit comes to live are God’s new temple; God’s intended place of dwelling--- where heaven and earth intersect.**

**With the coming of the Spirit to ‘temple in us’, Paul would have us to know...**

**... we are not simply the same old people with a few new God-experiences, we are new creations! (2 Corinthians 5:17). We have a new heart, with new God-ward impulses and a new way of thinking about life.**

**... all of this salvation work that God is accomplishing, takes place within the boundaries of our Spirit-inhabited humanity.**

**... the Spirit is the guarantee that God is always at work to restore what all of creation is groaning to be (Romans 8), he will not abandon the process (Philippians 1:6), and that he will not be satisfied until you are whole! (Ephesians 1:13-14: deposit—engagement ring).**

**The point of the Spirit is to enable us to follow Jesus’ “lead”. To go with him into the places to which he longs to bring his healing and restorative love.**

It means that whatever the people went to discover about God at the Temple, they should now find in us.

As people of Presence, it means that we give ourselves “now” to that which will either be fulfilled or eliminated in the future: we care for the poor, “now”, because in the Kingdom, there will be no starvation. We join another in their suffering, “now”, (wiping away a few tears, here and there) in anticipation of the elimination of painful tears. We forgive and are reconciled to others, “now”, because in the Kingdom, peace will rule over our relationships.