

Experiencing the Presence of God Sermon Series

Week One Notes

Exodus 3:1-6

In the well-known account of Moses and the burning bush, we gain early biblical insight into the way God reveals his presence to people. Commentator Matthew Henry calls this an “extraordinary manifestation of the divine presence and glory” and makes several observations from this passage about the way people experience the presence of God.¹

First, “what was visible was produced by an angel, but [Moses] heard God in it speaking to him.”² It is interesting that God spoke through the physical mediation of an angel—lit. a messenger. The angel is what appeared, the voice of God is what Moses heard. In the Gospels, Jesus referred to his disciples as messengers who were called to carry good news throughout Israel (John 13:16). In both contexts, the invisible God is present and “speaking” through the visible presence of the messenger he sent.

With regard to the fire, Henry notes that this was a brighter fire than the lamp and torch through which God appeared to Abraham when he promised the deliverance that was about to come through Moses (Genesis 15:17).³ There are hints of progression in the way God allowed

¹ Matthew Henry. (N.D.). Volume 1: Genesis to Deuteronomy. *Matthew Henry's Commentary*. McLean, VA: MacDonald Publishing Company, 280.

² Ibid., 280.

³ Ibid, 281.

his people to experience his presence. First a lamp containing fire, then a bush burning with fire. Soon it would be a much larger fire as God draws closer to his people and manifests his presence in greater and greater ways.

With regard to the presence of God in general, Henry notes that God spoke to Moses only after he took notice of the burning bush and turned to see it.⁴ He draws an inference in this for all who seek to experience the presence of God. He says, “those that would have communion with God must attend upon him, and approach to him, in those ordinances wherein he is pleased to manifest himself.”⁵ The sequence of events is noteworthy. The angel of the Lord appeared as fire in a bush within sight of Moses who was leading a herd of sheep through the desert. When Moses saw it, he made a conscious decision to “go over and see this strange sight” (Exodus 3:3). When God saw that Moses took notice and was coming near, he spoke to him. Following Henry’s observation, it’s worth recognizing that, in this case, the responsiveness of Moses to the messenger of God is what enabled him to hear the voice of God and experience his presence. Perhaps this is also true for church attenders today who hope to experience the presence of God.

The perspective gained from the biblical account of Moses experiencing the presence of God invites us to anticipate that God’s presence can be manifest to his people in at least three possible ways. The visible presence of God’s messenger accompanies the invisible presence of God as he speaks to his people. The “fire” of his presence increases with time and the progressive revelation of God’s work among his people. When we stop to investigate signs of God’s presence, he will then reveal himself more fully and directly. To be sure, none of these

⁴ Ibid., 281.

⁵ Ibid., 281.

should be read as prescriptive for every situation, but they should open our eyes to the possibility of experiencing God in these ways as we worship him today.