

Jason Upchurch - Systematic Theology - Theology Proper - Omnipresence

Turn to 1 Kings 20:26-34. We continue this morning in our study of the attributes of God himself. This is called Theology Proper. And this morning we're going to home in on just one attribute: that is the omnipresence of God.

And I want to begin with this story tucked into the Kings of the OT. Israel in the north is at war with Syria just north of them. Ahab - the wicked king of Israel is fighting Ben-hadad the wicked king of Syria. And Israel is outmanned big time. Syria had gathered a Ramires from 32 other kings and already dealt a massive blow to Israel and they're about to end it all. **Read 26-34**

Here's the interesting moral of the story here: God judges Syria because they deny a key attribute of God: his omnipresence. Syria thinks Yahweh is just a god of the hills - a local god. And Yahweh makes an example of them for this error.

This morning we come to the third of the Omni attributes. We saw God's omniscience - he knows all things past, present, future. Everything that is, could be. He knows you and me completely and will judge in righteousness.

And his Omnipotence - he is all powerful; he can do whatever he wills; nothing is too difficult for our God who calls himself "The Almighty."

But of the Omni attributes I really do think it is omnipresence that is the most encouraging to the believer.

Imagine going through a difficult time and you're trying to make it through. And you've got a good friend far away who knows what's going on. You call him, you text him, he's always in the loop. But there's something missing because he's far away. He knows, but he's not present.

Or imagine you have some task to undertake that seems impossible. And you have a friend who knows how to do it, has the ability and power to do it. But they are far away. They are powerful but they're not present.

This is the beauty of the reality of God's omnipresence. He is all knowing, he is all powerful, and he is all present. He is here. In fact,

And, you guys, to some extent being present with God is really the whole storyline of the Bible.

Creation: Adam and Eve were present with God, intimate fellowship with Yahweh in the Garden. Talking and communing with God.

Fall: That was broken. Not only were they banished from the Garden, but their intimate fellowship with God was gone.

Redemption: We have the restoration, in part, of intimate fellowship with God. Especially on this side of the cross we are filled not only with the Holy Spirit, but with the Father and Son as well.

Glory: We will see God. We will be on the New Earth in the New Garden where God is our light and his presence will be more obvious than the sun at midday.

For every Christian this is our hope: that the restoration of the presence of God we have now will one day give way to the visual presence of God in all of his glory. That's what we want: to be present with God forever and ever.

And so for us, the presence of God - and therefore the omnipresence of God is a wonderful doctrine. So let's define omnipresence.

Define: God is fully present in every place in creation (Joel Beeke)

Let me break that down a little and then we'll begin unpacking verses. First of all, the Triune God is omnipresent: Father, Spirit, Son - the one God - is all present everywhere. Even Jesus - the Son of God - when he took on flesh added to himself a human nature that is limited to space but in his divine nature was and is still omnipresent. When he was a little baby in the womb of Mary, his divine nature was everywhere present in all of creation.

How is it possible that God is present everywhere? Because the central reality is that God is spirit. He is not made up of stuff and so therefore he is not limited to space.

Now, it's important to know the limits of this. One limit in particular is that we reject what's called pantheism. Pan meaning all, theism meaning God.

Pantheism basically says that God is the universe. God is not distinct from the creation, but that God is the creation. We don't believe that. God is the Creator and everything we see and all the spiritual world are creations. There's a distinction between the omnipresent God, and the limited creation.

In fact, in **Romans 1** Paul says the problem with pagans is that they mix up the Creator and creation. So they worship birds and creeping things and climate changes and owls and whales and ozone holes and salmon and electric vehicles and ancestors because they think those things are God. They're not God. They're creations of the omnipresent God who is spirit.

Now you would think this is an obvious truth, that God is everywhere. But it's not and I think this episode we read helps understand that.

That's the funny part of this story here. Is that the people thought that God was a God of the hills. "He's limited in his scope to overseeing hill countries so all we gotta do is get him out of those places and we've got them!" Or so they thought.

Let me give you some passages about the omnipresence of God and then we're going to look at a bunch together this morning.

Acts 17:27-28 Paul is preaching the gospel in Ephesus and he actually quotes one of their own poets to proclaim the gospel. Here's the part he quotes: "God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him though he is not far away from any of us for "In him we live and move and have our being."

God left a record of who he is for all people. All of creation proclaims the majesty of God. And God himself is right there. He's not far from anyone. And even pagan poets know it.

When we do missions, we're not bringing God to people. God is already there. We're bringing the message about God to them.

Jer. 23:23-24: "Am I a God nearby, declares the Lord" and not a God far away?" Who can hide in secret places so that I cannot see them? Declares the Lord. Do I not fill heaven and earth declares the Lord?

Solomon knows that God is omnipresent. So even though he built a magnificence temple for God he knows the true theological reality that this small little temple in Jerusalem wouldn't actually contain the living God.

1 Kings 8:27: Behold heaven and the highest heavens cannot contain you; how much less this house I have built!

Isaiah 66:1-2: Thus says the Lord, Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool. What is the house that you would build for me? And what is the place of my rest? All these things my hands have made, and so all these things came to be, declares the Lord.

How are you going to contain God? He created everything. It's not possible. Certainly not in a temple made by human hands.

2 Thess. 1:9 hell is referred to as the place where people "suffer the punishment of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord and the glory of his might."

Hell is the place of suffering. And God's presence is absent. How can God be absent from hell if he's omnipresent? Good question! I don't think he's absent completely. I think what's missing in hell is the grace and mercy and beauty God. I think what people in hell experience is the unmitigated justice of God as they endure his wrath for all eternity.

By the way, when people talk about hell they often use a euphemism from this passage: that hell is separation from God. Now there's a sense in which that is true. But they usually use it because it sounds less offensive than suffering torment in the flames of hell forever. The problem is that for most unbelievers being superheated from God doesn't sound all that bad. They feel separated from him now. What's the big deal for all eternity. The big deal is the wrath of the Lamb - as **Rev 14:9-10** says.

That the beast and all his followers - every unbeliever - will drink the wine of the God's wrath poured full strength into the cup of his anger and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.

God is in hell too. Not suffering, pouring out wrath.

Jonah found that God is omnipresent when he tried to run away from God. He tries to get on a boat. He'll sail away from Yahweh. Good luck. Not only is God throwing hurricanes on the sea, but once Jonah is in the sea he prays to God from the bottom of the ocean and God hears him and sends a fish to swallow him. And then 3 days later Jonah prays again from inside the belly of the fish and God hears him and makes the fish vomit Jonah onto dry land.

The most random place on the planet - the belly of a fish swimming at the bottom of the Mediterranean Sea - God is there. And it's not just that he's there. He's there with Jonah. He's there with this disobedient prophet who knows better than to run away from God and God is there saving him from death at the bottom of the sea.

Now, I want to cover one more thing before we look at some passages. And that is that although God is omnipresent, there is also a sense in which God is specially present in certain places at certain times.

We see this even in the Garden of Eden. We know that God is in the Garden, but when Adam and Eve were expelled, they lost a special connection to God because they were no longer able to fellowship with God's special presence.

God is omnipresent, but when he leads the people out of Egypt he is specially present in the pillar of fire and cloud.

God is omnipresent but he is specially present in the OT Temple, and now in the NT Temple which is the Church.

God is specially present when we do church discipline. You know that verse "Where two or three are gathered, there I am with you?" That's **Matt 18**. And the context is that when two or three witnesses establish a charge against someone in sin. We do church discipline, we read the name of those who are in deliberate unrepentant sin to the congregation because if there are 2 or 3 witnesses the Bible tells us Jesus is there with those witnesses giving testimony to the sin.

I remember being in churches where the guy leading music would say "God we know that where two or three are gathered there you are." There you are about to discipline someone out of the church.

God is omnipresent but he is specially present in the Lord's Supper. Not in the elements themselves, but with us, communing with us. Having a spiritual meal with us as we eat the bread and drink the wine.

So yes he is present everywhere, but he is also specially present in many ways.

Now, we know that God is everywhere present, but what I want to do is talk about how this doctrine affects our lives. Because it really is an amazing grace of God that he's not just far off in heaven somewhere sending us text messages. No, he's here with us and he shows us grace in many ways.

1) Protection. That's what we see here in this passage. God is able to route the armies of the Syrians because he's with his people in battle. The Israelites were like a couple of small herds and their enemies were spread over the country like the sand on the sea shore. Doesn't matter. Why? Because God is there. On the battlefield.

Listen, God is with us wherever we go. There is no harm that can befall you except what comes from the hand of the Almighty because he is right there.

Does that mean we don't lock our doors or be careful in dangerous situations? Of course not. We take appropriate precautions for our safety.

Psalm 127: Unless the Lord builds the house those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city the watchman stays awake in vain.

So we build and we watch, but we know ultimately it's up to the omnipresent God to watch and build.

Omnipresence of God is our protection.

2) Omnipresence is a source of courage. **Turn to Josh 1:1-9**

Little kids are often scared to go somewhere at night, or explore too far. They want an adult

3) Intimacy with God. **Turn to Psalm 139:1-6**

Hand upon me - swat team or military guys going into close quarters. They put their hands on the shoulder.

4) Purity with God **Psalm 139:7-12**

- Jesus chair
- A lot of times we try to hide our sin.

5) Contentment with yourself **Psalm 139:13-16**

A lot of people want to change who they are: hair, face, gender.

6) Justice from God **Psalm 139:17-24**

7) Boldness to proclaim truth **Turn to Jer. 1:6-10**

- Might say "we don't have this promise!" Of course we do in the Great Commission: Go make disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them to obey. Why? Because I am what? I am with you. We go preach because God is with us.

8) Contentment. **Hebrews 13:5-6**

1 Tim. 6:9-10: But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.

Greatest comfort and encouragement as a believer is that God is with you. Not just knows about you and can act. But is here and does act. **Pray**