

“HOLY GROUND: AN ENCOUNTER WITH GOD.”

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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Text for the Sermon: Job 42:3, 5-6; Jeremiah 9:23-24; 29:12-13; Colossians 1:9-11

Chuck Colson, a taste of the majesty of God.

On June 1, 1973, Charles Colson visited his friend Tom Phillips, while Watergate exploded in the press. He was baffled and shocked at Phillips' explanation that he had "accepted Jesus Christ." But he saw that Tom was at peace and he wasn't. When Colson left the house, he couldn't get his keys in the ignition he was crying so hard. He says,

“That night I was confronted with my own sin—not just Watergate's dirty tricks, but the sin deep within me, the hidden evil that lives in every human heart. It was painful and I could not escape. I cried out to God and found myself drawn irresistibly into his waiting arms. That was the night I gave my life to Jesus Christ and began the greatest adventure of my life” (*Loving God*, p. 247).

End of the story? Maybe for some of us, but not for Chuck Colson.

Not only was the White House hatchet man willing to cry in 1973; he was also willing to repent several years later of a *woefully inadequate view of God*. It was during a period of unusual spiritual dryness. A friend suggested to Colson that he watch a videocassette lecture series by R.C. Sproul on the holiness of God. Here's what Colson writes:

“All I knew about Sproul was that he was a theologian, so I wasn't enthusiastic. After all, I reasoned, theology was for people who had time to study, locked in ivory towers far from the battlefield of human need. However, at my friend's urging I finally agreed to watch Sproul's series. By the end of the sixth lecture I was on my knees, deep in prayer, in awe of God's absolute holiness. It was a life-changing experience as I gained a completely new understanding of the holy God I believe in and worship. My spiritual drought ended, but this taste for the majesty of God only made me thirst for more of him” (*Loving God*, pp. 14–15).

Have you seen enough of God's holiness to have an insatiable taste for his majesty?

“A spiritual and saving knowledge of God is the greatest need of every human creature. ... An unknown God can neither be trusted, served nor worshipped”
(A.W. Pink, *The Attributes of God*, p. 7).

Nothing will bless the soul of man more and repay more richly than to pursue knowing more of the greatest subject there is to know.

My goal this morning is to move us out of our spiritual complacency.

It is essential to our eternal souls that we have an encounter with the living God. Apart from Him we are nothing, we have nothing, we will come to nothing. Only in Him do we live and move and breath. Do you know God? I mean do you really know God?

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Consider with me some divine, holy encounters with God in human history.

Moses, a burning bush, a cleft in the rock.

One day when Moses was minding his own business shepherding some sheep

Exodus 3:1-6 ... Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. ... God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." 5 Then he said, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." 6 And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

But years later Moses was hungry for more, and asked God:

Exodus 33:18-23 Moses said, "Please show me your glory." ... But," God said, "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live." 21 And the Lord said, "Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, 22 and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. 23 Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen."

Exodus 34:5-9 The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. 6 The Lord passed before him ... And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped."

What do you desire? What have you asked of God?

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Job, a righteous man discovers he is unrighteous.

Job 1:1 There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job; and that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil.

Job was a believer, a deeply devout and prayerful man. Surely he knew God as he ought. Surely he had a "taste for the majesty of God." But then came the pain and misery of his spiritual and

physical desert. Job questioned God and in the midst of his darkness God spoke in His majesty to Job:

Job 40:8–14; 41:10–11 Will you even put me in the wrong? Will you condemn me that you may be justified? Have you an arm like God, and can you thunder with a voice like his? Deck yourself with majesty and dignity; clothe yourself with glory and splendor . . . Look on everyone that is proud, and bring him low; and tread down the wicked where they stand . . . Then will I also acknowledge to you, that your own right hand can give you the victory . . . Who then is he that can stand before me? Who has given to me that I should repay him?

In the end Job repented, like Colson, of his woefully inadequate view of God, and came to a "completely new understanding of the Holy God." He says,

Job 42:3–6 Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me which I did not know . . . I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees thee; therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.

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Thomas, my Lord and My God.

John 20:24-29 Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."

26 Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." 28 Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Blessed are those who have not seen signs and wonders, miracles and majesty and yet have believed. There is a seeing with the heart that comes when the Holy Spirit opens the eyes of our hearts. It comes by prayer like Paul prayed in Ephesians 1.

Ephesians 1:16-18 my prayers, 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, 18 having the eyes of your hearts enlightened.

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Paul hits a bump on his Damascus Road.

Speaking of Paul:

Acts 22:4-10 I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women, ... I journeyed toward Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished. 6 “As I was on my way and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone around me. 7 And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?’ 8 And I answered, ‘**Who are you, Lord?**’ And he said to me, ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.’ ... And I said, ‘What shall I do, Lord?’ And the Lord said to me, ‘Rise, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do.’

He thought he knew God and the will of God, but he was on the wrong road until Jesus revealed Himself to Paul.

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Martin Luther, his tower experience.

The thunder storm experience, 1505.

While Martin Luther was hurrying home one night in 1505 A.D. a sudden clap of thunder and a bolt of lightning knocked him to the ground. In his terror he cried out: "St Anne, help me, and I will become a monk!" In his terror he saw the lightning as a warning of the terror of Judgement Day. He knew he had to get right with God and thought the only way was to become a monk.

The Tower Experience, 1517 or 1518.

Was that the end of the story? Was that experience enough to sustain his spiritual life? No, one night in 1517 up in his tower study he describes this experience as he studied Romans 1:17, “For in it (the gospel) the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”:

"I greatly longed (burning desire) to understand Paul's epistle to the Romans and nothing stood in the way but that one expression "the righteousness of God," because I took it to mean that righteousness whereby God is just and deals justly in punishing the unjust.

My situation was that, although an impeccable monk, I stood before God as a sinner troubled in conscience, and I had no confidence that my merit would assuage Him. Therefore I did not love a just angry God, but rather hated and murmured against Him. Yet I clung to the dear Paul and had a great yearning to know what he meant.

Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the righteousness of God and the statement that "the just shall live by faith." Then I grasped that the righteousness of God is that

righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before "the righteousness of God" had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gate to heaven..." - Martin Luther

Blaise Pascal, a night of fire.

Blaise Pascal was a 17th century French mathematician and physicist raised in the heyday of the Enlightenment which elevated reason saying, "Who needs God? Man can make it on his own."

"Night of fire"

All the while, Pascal was struggling spiritually, he wrestled with the dichotomy between the world and God, between reason and faith.

After running from God until he was 31 years old, on November 23, 1654 at 10:30 pm, Pascal met God and was profoundly and unshakably converted to Jesus Christ. He wrote it down on a piece of parchment and sewed it into his coat where it was found after his death eight years later. It said,

"Year of grace 1654, Monday 23 November, feast of St. Clement . . . from about half past ten at night to about half an hour after midnight, FIRE. God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, not of philosophers and scholars. Certitude, heartfelt joy, peace. God of Jesus Christ. God of Jesus Christ. "My God and your God." . . . Joy, Joy, Joy, tears of joy. . . Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ. May I never be separated from him."

John Wesley, a heart strangely warmed.

John Wesley found himself crying out, "Lord, help my unbelief!" However, he felt dull within and little motivated even to pray for his own salvation. On May 24th, 1738 he opened his Bible at about five in the morning and came across these words, "There are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, even that we should be partakers of the divine nature."

That evening he reluctantly attended a meeting in Aldersgate. Someone read from Luther's Preface to the Epistle to Romans. About 8:45 p.m. "while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."

It took him some time to learn how to live the life of faith, for he was not always possessed of joy and thought he had fallen from salvation. It took time for him to see that it is not Christ and good works, but Christ alone who saves, resulting in good works.

Growing in Knowing God.

Jesus once asked a man, “Do you want to be healed?” Some people are complacent and content in their complacency. So it is appropriate to ask, “Do you desire to know God?” Or are you satisfied with where you are?

Listen again to Paul’s prayer for growing in the knowledge of God.

Colossians 1:9-10 We have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.

Do we ever pray like this? Mostly we pray that God would give us better health or a better job or help us do better in school or that He would send rain or that He would give us a spouse or a child or that He would give us more patience or that He would help us through some crisis, these are all good prayers and God is pleased to hear and answer them.

But such prayers miss the deepest needs of our souls, they are shallow compared to what is supremely important and will matter most in all eternity.

Paul is not praying that we know more about God, that we know facts and details. Paul is not praying for more academic knowledge of God. He is pleading for personal, experiential, intimate, real knowledge of God Himself through Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

This knowledge is personal, it comes from God Himself. I can preach about it all day long but you won’t grow in it unless you ask God to open the eyes of your heart. Only those who ask will receive and only those who seek will find.

I plead with you to make this your greatest desire for the sake of your own joy, for the sake of your own satisfaction with life, for the sake of your own peace of mind, for the sake of your own sanity in the midst of a crazy life and world.

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Press in and desire to know the one true living God, the Lord God Almighty, the maker of heaven and earth, the God who is enthroned above the heavens and the earth, the King who is eternal, invisible, the only wise God, the “blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, 16 who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To [whom] be honor and eternal dominion” forever and ever (I Timothy 6:15-16).

Prayer: Holy Father, we have tasted your goodness but are ashamed at our lack of desire for more of you. Make us thirsty for more of you. Fill us with a holy longing. Grant us a glimpse of your glory and then make us want to see more. We have wandered in the lowlands long enough; make us desire the heights you have created us for. Give us grace to ask and seek and knock, to press further up and further in this summer for your glory and our greater joy and peace, in the name of Jesus.