Gravity – Part One

# The Comfort of a Place

# (John 4.4-24)

Welcome to Christ’s Community Church. Today we’re beginning a brand-new message series entitled GRAVITY, talking about obstacles to the presence of God. This is a topic that burdens my heart because it’s something that I truly believe reflects the heart of God for the Church. And so, what we want to do is find balance in God, learning to improve and properly express our love for God, knowing that even from the beginning of time Cain and Abel experienced conflict in this one area.

In fact, it was on Mount Moriah that Abraham learned to express his love for God in the offering of his son. Moses and the Israelites on the shore of the Red Sea as they sang a song of praise for God’s unfailing love after being delivered from Egyptian bondage. But even more specifically as they read the 10 Commandments engraved on two stone tablets on Mount Sinai. This is what Jesus reminds us of in Matthew chapter 22, where he stressed the importance of finding balance in God, pointing out what he described as the first and greatest commandment. He said in verse 37,

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37).

The problem is that many times this can be a challenge. In fact, honestly, we can be passionate, enthusiastic, and devoted to many things, but it’s often a misdirected passion. You know, it could be your favorite band or artist, a sports team or athlete, and you may be good at cheering, celebrating or worshiping within that context and experience, but when you come to church it’s just so much less. Even though Jesus was very clear that our priority, our number one responsibility as believers is to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and yet somehow as we come to church, and we miss out on the passion.

If I were to ask you if you experienced the presence of God with zeal and enthusiasm in the last 30 minutes of worship, you know, I mean did you really enter in, lifting your voice and your hands, worshiping Jesus for who he is and thanking him for what he’s done? Or would you have to admit that it just wasn’t quite as fervent or passionate as Jesus might have hoped it would be?

You see, when we come to worship, we want to express the deepest part of our hearts and our love for God. But honestly, sometimes we show up a little bit late and just watch the band perform, instead of participating, and we miss out on the opportunity to experience the presence of God. We’re in the right place, we’re doing the right things, but just maybe we’ve got the wrong state of mind.

You know, Jesus actually talked about this in Matthew chapter 15, he said, “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me…” And then he said this, he said, “they worship me in vain” (Matthew 15:8-9) which reminds me of a conversation that Jesus had with a woman at a well in John chapter 4. John tells us that Jesus and his disciples had traveled all day, and now they had gone into the city to get some food, but Jesus remained by the well because he was thirsty.

It’s kind of interesting that the one who himself is a spring of water welling up to eternal life would be thirsty, but nonetheless, Jesus remained there at the well waiting for this Samaritan woman to come with a bucket to draw some water. Now, she was unaware that she had a divine appointment with the Son of God, but as she was pulling that bucket of water up out of the well Jesus began to share with her the truth about “living water.” They began conversing, and so he began sharing with her who he was, what he had to offer, and how she could receive it.

Now, she didn’t understand what he was saying, but Jesus words had aroused her interest. And so, in verse 15 she asked him for this “living water” that he offered her,

“Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water" (John 4:15).

Jesus, knowing that the only way to prepare her heart for what he had to give her was to plow it up with conviction and so he replied in verse 16,

“Go, call your husband and come back” (John 4:16).

With the wisdom of God, he forced her to admit her sin knowing that without conviction and repentance she couldn’t experience saving faith. And so, Jesus had aroused her curiosity and stirred her emotions, but he also had to touch her conscience confronting her sin. In verse 17, she replied,

"I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband" (John 4:17-18).

However, instead of allowing that conviction to move her to repentance she tried to take Jesus on a theological detour by discussing the differences between their religions.

"Sir," she said, "I can see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem" (John 4:19-20).

Now, the Bible does speak of seeking God on the mountain, but Jesus revealed that she did not know who to worship, where to worship, or how to worship. He declared in verse 21,

“Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4:21-24).

Now, this was a shocking statement for Jesus to say that worship was no longer limited to a place. And yet the reality is that only those who have this living water, the indwelling Holy Spirit, are able to obey the truth and worship God acceptably. And so, Jesus declares that these are the kind of worshipers that God the Father seeks. And there is a mountain that God is asking you and I to climb and it’s the mountain of his presence.

You see, God’s presence is different than his omnipresence. His omnipresence is what makes God, God. Omni means everywhere and that means that God is everywhere at the same time. He’s all-knowing and all-powerful but God’s manifest presence is what Isaiah promised, he said they’ll call him “Immanuel"—which means, "God with us” (Matthew 1:23).

And so, God is not just everywhere, he’s here, he’s with us. God’s omnipresence is his nature, it’s one of his attributes, but his manifest presence is the personal experience of God. This is what David was telling us in Psalm chapter 34, he said,

“Taste and see that the Lord is good” (Psalm 34:8).

And this is the way that Jesus presents himself. He says, I’m the living water, the manna from heaven, the bread of life, meaning that he’s something that we can experience, that he’s something tangible, something real and genuine. And that’s why David cried out in deep anguish of his soul saying,

“Don’t banish me from your presence” (Psalm 51:11, NLT).

Don’t take your presence from me. And so, I want to encourage you this morning that God wants you to seek him, to climb the mountain, to reach for the summit, because he went you to experience his fullness. That’s why the Psalmist prayed,

“Send forth your light and your truth, let them guide me; let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell” (Psalms 43:3).

God wants you to seek to live in his presence continually. In fact, that’s what we see characterized in the life of David. He said, “My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God” (Psalm 84:2). And throughout the Psalms, we find David searching for God through guilt and shame, struggling with his feelings and emotions, rising before the dawn and staying awake at night, and as you come to the end of the Psalms you find David rejoicing, praising God, because he’d experienced his presence.

You see, the thing is that God was never lost, he was always there, and so David wasn’t just seeking after God, but he was seeking for God’s manifest presence. He wanted to experience God in a new way, in a much greater way, like the apostle Paul said,

“I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him” (Philippians 3:8-9).

Even Moses, knowing God like he did and having all the promises of God said that he needed more. You know, you’d think that if God gave you a promise and said, I’m going to send an angel to help you reach the promised land that that would be enough. But in Exodus chapter 33, Moses said to him, in verse 15,

"If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here" (Exodus 33:15).

He said, “God, I’d rather have you in the wilderness than to be in the promised land without you. I just want to know your presence. And so, if you’re not going with me, I’m not going anywhere.” You see, Moses, David, and Paul knew the personal presence of God and they wouldn’t be satisfied without it.

Today, I want you to know that God wants you to seek his presence, to live in his presence, hiding in the shadow of his wings, because it’s only there that our lives are transformed. But as we saw in the testimony of the woman at the well, there are obstacles to the presence of God, and the first one that we’re going to look at today is the comfort of a place.

You see, when you are in a certain place, it feels like the right place and therefore you think that because you’re in that place that you are already in the presence of God. That’s with the woman of Samaria said,

“Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem” (John 4:20).

But, being in that place, that group, or that denomination is not the same as being close to God. This woman was close to that mountain, and yet she was far from the Lord.

Another time, Jesus was addressing the religious community and said, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 7:21). And then he said that there would be a group of people who would come to him and say,

'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?” And Jesus says, “Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers” (Matthew 7:22-23).

Now, I want you to notice that they didn’t say. They didn’t say, “I prophesied in your name, or I drove out demons, or I performed many miracles.” And so, these ones who were rejected by Jesus didn’t do this work, they weren’t ministering in the Spirit, they were just part of a group that did. They were with those who were prophesying, casting out demons, and performing miracles, but Jesus said that is not enough. In other words, you can be there, you can be in that place, you can identify with a church, and feel like you’re doing all the right things because you’re in the right place, but still be far from God. Today I want to encourage you to step over that geographical obstacle, realizing that God isn’t just in the place, but he is here so that we can personally encounter the presence of God.

In Luke chapter 15, Jesus tells a parable about a woman who loses a coin. It’s a familiar story because we’ve all been there, it is kind of like losing your keys. You know they’re there, they are right there in the house, but you can’t find them anywhere. And Jesus says,

“Suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it?” (Luke 15:8).

Notice that the woman did not lose the coin somewhere in the backyard, she didn’t leave it at work, but it was right there in the house. And so, she turned on the lights and began cleaning house so that she could find the missing coin. You know, it’s right there, it’s in the house, but it’s lost.

Unfortunately, I believe the same thing is happening in many places today within Christianity. There are many people who are lost in church; they’re not just lost in the world, they’re not just lost in sin, but they’re lost in church. Today there are many Christians lost in church, Catholics lost in church, Jehovah’s Witnesses lost in church, Seventh-day Adventists lost in church and God the Father is sweeping through the church, sometimes sweeping through our lives, illuminating the dark places, looking for that precious one he lost. You see, just because you’re in the house doesn’t mean that you’re not lost. Just because you’re in the house doesn’t mean that you’re in his presence.

In fact, you may remember the story of Mary and Martha. Martha was in the house, she was serving, but Mary was in his presence and Jesus said,

“Only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better” (Luke 10:42).

Today, God wants you to choose what is better, to be in his presence, not just in the right place, not just in the house, but in his presence. You see, the first obstacle to experiencing the presence of God is the misconception that nearness to the church or nearness to a certain group of people means that you’re close to God.

Now, surely, it’s good to be in church, but the body of Christ is merely the vehicle to introduce you to Jesus. He is the one who is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the one who was, who is, and is to come, and today he is calling every single Christian into his presence. He hasn’t just invited you to become a member of Christ’s Community Church, even though being in the church is good, he has called you to be in his presence.

You see, God the Father finds pleasure in your company. He desires your presence. In fact, he loved your presence so much that he has scars on his hands and feet and a scar in his side to prove that your presence was worth dying for. You have been called by the King of Kings, you’ve been summoned by the Lord of lords to come into his presence, and therefore it’s not an option, it’s not just an upgrade to Christianity, but to live in his presence is the only life there is.

And so, I want to encourage you this morning to come into his presence, making time every day, not just for prayer, but to be in the presence of God, being close with the Holy Spirit. Taking that time when you are alone, just being quiet and separating yourself from the distractions and busyness of the world, and saying, “Father show me your glory, I want to see your face, I want to see who you are.” And so, no matter whether it’s in the morning, whether it’s at night, during the day or at work, seek his presence, because when you do it brings great pleasure to the heart of the Father.

Do you realize that God is longing for you to know him in that way? Not just to know about him, but that you would know him personally? This is a privilege of the children of God, and it’s born out of time in his presence, time on our knees, time in his word, where we become intimately acquainted with him. Now, I know that there are some of you who would love to experience that kind of intimacy with God, but you don’t feel it, and so I’d like to encourage you that God is worthy of your time whether you feel it or not.

You see, our feelings follow obedience, but they never proceeded. The order is always the same: God reveals himself, he blesses us, and then he asks us to respond. In other words, God blesses us first and then he asks us to obey. And so, what do we do? Well, we acknowledge like the woman at the well that we’ve been worshiping the wrong things, worshiping in the wrong place and we lay it all down and come to Jesus. It’s coming with honesty and humility, surrendering it all and saying, this one thing I seek, this one thing I ask, this is it, this is all I want, that I can encounter you in the power of your presence. And if you will do that, seeking him, hungering and thirsting for the things of God you will find him.

And so, as we close, I want to speak this verse over us as we seek his presence. Psalm chapter 141 says,

“O Lord, I call to you; come quickly to me. Hear my voice when I call to you. May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice” (Psalms 141:1-2).

You see, lifted hands means victory and it means surrender. And so, when we lift our hands in worship it means both, because we’re celebrating the fact that the tomb is empty, we’re victorious in Christ Jesus, and it also means that we’re surrendering everything to him. I assure you that there is nothing in this world more worthy of our affection or our worship than Jesus Christ. Let’s pray together as we close.

Pastor John Talcott

Christ's Community Church

303 West Lincoln Avenue

Emmitsburg, MD 21727

November 03, 2019

[www.cccaog.org](http://www.cccaog.org)

*Graphics, notes, and commentary from LifeChurch, Ministry Pass, PC Study Bible, Preaching Library, and Sermon Central. Scripture from the New International Version unless otherwise noted.*