

Where is God?

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[0 : 0 0] we're going to continue asking that same question that we were thinking about with the boys and girls and the question is a very simple one it's almost childish isn't it almost too childish to consider amongst our adult group today and it's the question where is God but it's not just a simple question it's not just a childish question it's actually a really profound question and it's a question that leads us on a journey because you know as well as I do that the only answer to this question is found in the Bible and if the question where is God like every other question will lead us into the Bible then all the better that's what we're here for there is no other answer to this question you can't just make up answers you can't just say well

I would like to think that well that's of no use to anybody where we really find the answer to this question is in the pages of scripture and there are two simple answers to this question and both of them are right the first answer is that God is in heaven but then that begs the question where is heaven and that again is another important question that should tax and should exercise our mind and I'm sure it's one that you've thought about very often because if we are promised that one day when we die we will go to heaven then naturally we want to know well where is heaven what is it like what's it like to be there these are natural questions I hope you do ask them and don't dismiss them as some kind of childish so simple something so simple that it really doesn't doesn't is not worth thinking of of course it's worth thinking about that's what God has promised everlasting life to those who believe and trust in Jesus Christ so it's only natural to think well where is heaven how does my soul get to heaven how will my body rise again from the dead on the last day and my soul and my body reunite together and go forever to be with the Lord there's so little detail isn't there and and yet it is God's word it's God's promise and we believe it somehow God will make it happen he will raise his people from the dead he will reunite our bodies and our souls and we will go forever to be with the Lord so heaven is where God is therefore God is in heaven heaven is beyond this dimension there is no scientific basis for heaven that we know of anyway it is something other than our understanding and if we're not content with that then we'll never be content with

God but the other answer to the question where is God is God is everywhere that's what the psalm is all about at least in part it describes in beautiful language the what we call in theology the omnipresence of God the omnipresence of God which is the simple truth that wherever the universe is wherever existence is of any kind God is there which means that he isn't in one place at one time he is everywhere he's in the smallest atom the smallest quark whatever that is and he's also in the greatest sun and moon and the stars he's in the seven he's in the heavens in all its complexity and in all its grandeur

God is there where can I go from your spirit where can I flee from your presence if I go up to the heavens you are there if I make my bed in the depths you are there if I rise on the wings of the dawn if I settle on the far side of the sea which is the psalmist way of saying it doesn't matter where I go you are there before me which also it leads us to the truth that there is nothing we can show God there is nothing that God needs to discover that he doesn't know already God has always been there before us there is nothing that he doesn't know if I say surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me even the darkness will not be dark to you the night will shine like the day for darkness is as light to you so God is everywhere and we'll come on to the implications of that truth a little bit later on and there are implications as there were for David who wrote this and yet even although God is everywhere the Bible shows us that from time to time God chooses to locate himself in a particular place for a particular reason let me say that again even although God is everywhere remember what we're asking we're asking where is God God is everywhere even so the Bible shows us that God chooses from time to time to locate himself in a particular place for a particular purpose probably the very first time that we come across this is in

the garden of Eden Genesis chapter 3 and verse 8 you remember what happened after Adam and Eve chose together to disregard God's command and they ate of the forbidden fruit the first thing that happened was they made leaves for themselves to cover their nakedness and they hid from the presence of God what do we read after that they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden now we've just said

[7 : 04] God is everywhere and yet this verse tells us way at the very beginning just after they've sinned is that they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in one place at one time in one location in the garden in the cool of the day and they were utterly terrified it appears that this was a regular occurrence and up until that point it was a it was a delight to be and to meet with God as he walked in the garden and as he met with them and conversed with them and talked with them but now it is a horrific prospect they are dead scared why?

because they have disobeyed his word and they know that they're condemned God had already said to them in the day that you eat thereof you will surely die now they've done it and there's no going back they feel something they've never felt before the guilt and the condemnation that comes with having sinned against God now we're not given any other information other than he walked in the garden in the cool of the day but it's enough information we don't need any more information do we?

you get the message God has chosen to meet with the people that he has created in order to converse with people who are conscious of him people who are made in his image that's what makes humankind unique from every other creature we're able to relate to God and so God has taken a special interest in the man and his wife Adam and Eve and even although God condemned the world because of what they did that did not stop him from continuing to locate himself from time to time in various places and converse with various people that is what the Bible is all about it's not just a bunch of the history of a bunch of random people who happen to live and do stuff what brings them all together is the fact that God was fulfilling his reason and his plan and his purpose so from time to time

God chooses to meet with people and to speak to them and to give them encouragement and to make them promises and to give them commands and to show them how to live we're not told that he always showed himself sometimes there was a visible form we're going to see that tonight in a particular instance where God meets with Moses in Exodus chapter 33 sometimes God showed himself in a visible form other times he just spoke to people and when he did show himself in a visible form it was always carefully chosen in order to convey a particular truth about himself for example when God showed himself in the form of fire like the burning bush with Moses what does the fire mean it's not that God looks like fire God doesn't have that kind of appearance God is invisible but he took the form of fire in order to drive home a particular truth about himself which is that he is holy and without sin he is other he's not like us he is different he's unique and he is perfect in every way his fire reminds us that he is unapproachable that he is pure he is magnificent there is a majesty there's an awesomeness about God which is indescribable and incomprehensible and it would do us good just to stop just to think about God's glory what the Bible tells us about God's glory as we make our way through the

Old Testament that is the recurring pattern where God chooses certain individuals he selects certain individuals to meet with them for example Abraham or Noah when he told Noah we're not told that he took on any visible form when he spoke to Noah he just simply told him to build the ark and then we move on to Abraham who he chose from his hometown of Ur of the Chaldees and told him to emigrate to a country he had never set foot before and there in Canaan God met with him and he spoke to him and made a promise to him that hereafter Abraham would be the father of many nations and that he would possess the land and that his children would belong to God and that God would be their God and thereafter he chooses to speak to meet with Jacob sometimes taking on a visible form and sometimes not one of the most fascinating visible manifestations of God was of course the mysterious figure in the

[12 : 42] Old Testament that is called the angel of the Lord you come across him every so often Abraham met with him Jacob met with him Moses met with him Joshua met with him the angel of the Lord you ever ask yourself who is this mysterious figure is it just an angel or is there something more to this I believe there is there's something more to this particular angel it's not like Michael or Gabriel or the other angels there is a particular person I should person I'm not sure if you call an

angel a person but a particular angel called the angel of the Lord and what makes him unique is that sometimes he's called the angel of the Lord and sometimes he's simply called the Lord which means that there's more to this mysterious angel than what we first imagined could this be the first indications in the

Old Testament of what God was ultimately going to one day do in the person of Jesus Christ could this just be could this be the first indication the first prophecy if you like the first prophetic manifestation that God was going that was telling his people that one day he would condescend into the world and be born in Bethlehem you remember how he met with Moses in the flames of the burning bush after 400 years of apparent silence when the children of Israel suffered in Egypt all of a sudden out of nowhere in the desert no one else around the middle of nowhere God appears to Moses in the flames of the burning bush this was God reappearing amongst his people commanding

Moses to go back to them and to lead them out of Egypt and into the promised land and thereafter like I say from time to time God speaks to Moses he gives him commands he then does something quite unique he does something he's never done before he tells Moses to build a special place a location called the tabernacle and the uniqueness about the tabernacle wasn't just a place of worship it wasn't even just a place of sacrifice but the uniqueness of the tabernacle was that it was a place where God himself would descend into not just for a little time but in order to stay when they had finished the tabernacle and the most holy place which was the most mysterious place of all the most beautiful place was forbidden to anyone it was the place where

God literally descended into and lived there so now what we see is that God is doing something more permanent he's not just visiting the world from time to time but he is actually coming down and he is living amongst his people but despite the fact that they had this massive privilege of God literally the glory of God literally living amongst them none of them were allowed to approach his presence why because he was holy and they were not because he was perfect and they were sinful and the perfect and the sinful simply cannot join together there had to be a curtain there had to be a barrier there had to be a prohibition keep out on pain of death do not come near and that was a really important message one which the people of

Israel must understand but it's one that we must understand as well and it was one that helps us to understand the importance of what Jesus did when he came into the world to remove that barrier between us and God but I'm jumping ahead of myself I think you know where the story is going don't you you know where the story is going we're talking about how God descends into the world from time to time to meet with individuals because he has a plan and he does this from time to time throughout the course of the Old Testament sometimes like I say he took on a visible form like for example in Ezekiel if you ever want to be mystified by the mysterious form that God chooses to appear in then read the first chapters of Ezekiel he appears to

[18:02] Isaiah the prophets sometimes he takes a visible form sometimes he doesn't but every time he does it is to get across some important truth about himself and then came at the very end of the Old Testament that time when the people of Israel were driven into exile and it appears that God went silent actually he wasn't because you remember that even in exile there were people like Ezekiel who saw visions and Daniel who saw visions but for many years he was silent there appeared to be no sign that God was reappearing or speaking to his people it may have appeared that he had forgotten them all together and I'm sure many of them concluded that very thing because they had sinned against him they were under his judgment and his condemnation that's why they were in

Babylon as a scattered people and yet God was not going to remain silent because the day came when he did something he had never done before something new happened in the fullness of time out of the silence out of the darkness out of the blue something seismic happened something earth shattering and it happened in secret in silence in the darkness of a woman's womb a baby was conceived well babies are conceived all the time all over the world nothing unusual about that except this time there was no human father instead this was a miracle and the result was a truly unique human being was born a human being who was

God a human being who was God did you get that a human being who was God God had once again come down to earth and yet this time something new was happening something completely unprecedented this time God took upon himself he took to himself human nature he became a baby in the womb of Mary and was born in Bethlehem and he wasn't coming this time to dwell for a few

days or a few months he was coming as one of us to stay with us to be with us to suffer with us and to suffer for us this was the ultimate presence of

God so where is God God is everywhere God is in heaven and yet God for us most immediately is Jesus Christ if you're asking the question where is God that's the answer that's our most immediate answer that's why he said to his disciples he who has seen me has seen the father he made it abundantly clear by his life and his conduct and his perfection that he couldn't have been anyone else Nicodemus came to him at night in John chapter 3 and said we know you are a teacher sent from God because no one could do the miraculous signs that you're doing unless God was with him but there was more than him being a teacher he was God he walked on the water he fed the five thousand he spoke to the dead and the dead were raised in an instant you can't do that unless you're

God but do you get what's happening God has come down into this world and he has become a man a human being I want us never ever to lose sight of the grandeur of this moment of the awesomeness of this truth don't ever lose sight of it I know it's not Christmas time but every day ought to be Christmas day for those of us who know Jesus and those of us who have discovered this earth shattering reality that the presence of God is Jesus Christ you remember what the apostle John says we saw his glory the glory as of the only begotten of the father he came he dwelt among us and the word he uses for dwelt in

[23 : 18] John chapter 1 there the word he uses for dwelt is the same word as the tabernacle remember we spoke about the tabernacle how the glory of God had descended into the world and had descended into the camp of Israel and had dwelt in the most holy place well John is saying exactly the same thing is happening with Jesus except this time there is no barrier the reason there's no barrier is because Jesus came to remove it there was only one way in which he could remove it by paying the ultimate price for our guilt and for our sin by taking our guilt upon himself and by taking our sin upon himself and by dying which is the wages of sin the condemnation that we deserve so where is God this morning I hope I've helped us to have a wider appreciation of the answer to that God is in heaven but I'm afraid we're going to have to get there before we start understanding what that means

God is everywhere we're just going to have to accept that as well it's mind blowing but God is Jesus Jesus who lived among us Jesus who was born in Bethlehem Jesus who we read about in the gospels Jesus who died on the cross and rose again that's where you find God that's where God is that's how you come to know God for yourself in Jesus Christ so no one need say well God is so mysterious and so inexplicable there's no way I can ever connect with him that's not true Jesus said come to me and believe follow me have faith in me what about on a practical level see the time is going what about on a practical level what does the presence of

God mean in terms of our daily day to day Christian living and our understanding let me just say one or two things in closing when we think about where is God the presence of God let's first of all be careful when we say things in prayer and I've done it myself and I probably do it when we sometimes say in prayer Lord we come into your presence many of you said that don't need to put your hands up I have and I know what you mean and I know what I mean when I say it but let's be careful to try and understand what we mean by the presence of God you're never out of the presence of God and in a sense you're no more in the presence of God when you begin to pray I know what you mean but just let's be careful when we use phrases like that let's also remember that there is no such place as a holy place you know a few months ago we were in lockdown complete lockdown churches were closed doors were closed locked no churches couldn't be used and then the government said well

I'll tell you what we can open churches for private prayer remember that and the idea there is that somehow that if I can go into a church building then it's more appropriate for prayer than in my kitchen well where do you get that from who said that a church was brought you any that just because you're in a church building you're any closer to God than you are in your bedroom you aren't you can pray just as effectively to God in your car and that's why we made the decision or I think we made the decision that we weren't going to go down that road because we don't want to encourage people to think that somehow you're closer to God in a church than you are in your house you're not God is everywhere and I've heard people saying things like oh I love to get out in the country because I'm closer to God when

I'm out in the country are you where did you get that from how are you closer to God in the country than you are in Rosemount Viaduct you aren't what's more is when we think about heaven and I hope you do think about heaven I really do we're so caught up with the minutiae of this world that we don't think of what God is preparing for us that while let me say this that whilst one day we will see God more manifestly in heaven that's what we're promised we'll be no closer to him than we are here do you agree with that maybe you disagree with it that's fine I don't think we'll be closer to God in heaven than we are here and neither will he love his people more in their perfection in heaven than he does in their imperfection on earth think of that

[28 : 47] God's love for you will not increase once you get to heaven it'll be the same as it is today in all your imperfection and in mine remember this also that God dwells in every believer what was it Jesus said to his disciples he said that the Holy Spirit John chapter 14 the Holy Spirit when he went to the father that he would send his spirit and that he would come and be amongst us as another counselor and he will be in you what that means is that a person who's a Christian is not just forgiven it's not just justified but he or she is indwelt by God himself that's where God is if you're a follower of

Jesus you don't need to look for God a million miles away you don't even need to ask where is God he is right there isn't that the most amazing truth and what that means is that God has not withheld anything from us us you know there are some Christians who talk about you know different tiers of blessing Paul tells us that we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus God has withheld nothing from us which means that we are to practice the presence of God we are to practice the presence of God you ever heard that phrase before

I heard it long long time ago when I was a young Christian and I've never forgotten it I think it's one of the most important pieces of advice that I could give to anyone whether you're young or old to practice the presence of God to live in the presence of God every day to never forget that he is in you he is with you he's watching everything you do he's taking an interest he's concerned he deeply loves you as a person wants the very best for you and he is concerned for your protection and your forgiveness and for your growth as a Christian he's right there yesterday was reformation day it was Halloween but Halloween's nothing reformation day is far more important than Halloween we don't really celebrate reformation day I think as much as we should it was one of my regrets in ministry that I didn't make a habit of every the end of

October in celebrating reformation people say well a sectarian no it's not it's just basically remembering a great event a wonderful event that took place when Martin Luther nailed the 95 theses to the door of Wittenberg Castle Church and there began a movement that has resulted and none of us would be here today by the way if it wasn't for the reformation none of us and one of the rediscoveries at the time of reformation is simply this that God is not a million miles away you see before the reformation people were under the impression and they were taught they were misled by the church the church was saying well there's no way what you have to do all you can do is to do your best to live as good a life as possible and to pray to the saints and to pray to the Virgin Mary and to do all the things that we tell you and then maybe maybe one day maybe one day after a million years in purgatory you might end up in heaven that was literally the teaching of the church so you lived in fear and if you put a foot wrong you're thinking well how am I going to pay for this how am I going to make it right with

God and how am I going to make sure there are enough good things in my life to earn my way into heaven I have no chance well I certainly would have no chance anyway but at the reformation you know what they discovered they discovered that a God was not unreachable you didn't have to go through the tears to reach him you didn't have to pray to anyone except there was only one mediator one person in whose name you got direct access to God and that was Jesus Christ and him alone that was what the reformation discovered and that is what we're all about today that's what I'm trying to share with you this morning that God is present and that he delights in the company of his people he delights to hear them to accept them to accept you even if you're coming confessing your sin and your weakness and your failure as I am

[34 : 11] God delights in his people and he is an ever present help an ever present savior who has promised himself to his people let's practice his presence our father in heaven we pray that you will restore to us that great truth that we don't need to go looking for you when you're right there all the time when you are calling out to us in the clearest of terms we pray that we will hear your voice and that we will live in you obediently and faithfully as we are forgiven and as we are led by you in Jesus

name amen