

God Is: Meditations on the Attributes of God

God is ... Everywhere (Psalm 139:7-12)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn to HCC on December 17, 2023

Introduction

- ❖ **Have you ever wished you could be in more than one place at the same time?** Perhaps you have the experience of being pulled in different directions managing your family and their various needs. One kid has a practice on this side of town. Your other kid has a recital at the same time on the other side of town. And your other kid needs a nap. If only you could be in three different places at the same time. It would be so convenient. So helpful.
 - Or maybe, you've got a term paper to write. But you also need to get to the library to work on that group project. But really you just want to be at that Christmas party at your friend's place. **You wish you could be in all three places and do all three things all at once.** It would make your life so much easier.
 - But you can't. It's impossible. There's only one of you. **And you can only be in one place at one time.** That's the reality. That's the natural limitation for creatures like us. We are bound in a body. We are always localized in one particular spot on the face of this planet. We can't be everywhere all at once.
- ❖ But God can. That's one of the key differences between God and man. **God is omnipresent. We are not. He is everywhere all at once. While we are always found in one place at one time.** We are clearly *not* omnipresent.
 - Omnipresence is considered one of the four classical incommunicable attributes of God. Attributes unique to him alone. Attributes that he does not share with human beings created in his image. We've covered the first three: God's independence, his immutability, and his eternity. Today, our focus is on his omnipresence.

Defining God's Omnipresence

- ❖ Let's begin with a definition. Let's make sure we're on the same page when we speak of God being omnipresent. **In a straightforward sense, we mean his presence is everywhere.** He's in all places. There is no place, in all creation, where God is not. He's everywhere. **Now while that's a true statement, it's an insufficient statement.** Because to simply claim that "God is everywhere" could still lead to some faulty conclusions.
 - **An obvious mistake would be to think in terms of God being one with everything everywhere.** That's pantheism. The idea that God is found in everything everywhere. But Scripture soundly rejects that. The Bible draws a clean distinction between God and his creation. So that's clearly *not* what we mean by God's omnipresence.
- ❖ But even with pantheism aside, when people hear "God is everywhere" some interpret that to just mean God is infinitely larger than us. **He fills up infinitely more spaces than the rest of us.** He exists in every space everywhere. But if that's all that omnipresence means, then it wouldn't be an incommunicable attribute. It would be something we share with him.
 - **Have you wondered why God's omnipotence and omniscience are considered communicable attributes while his omnipresence is the one omni-attribute that's incommunicable?** It's because, when it comes to omnipotence and omniscience, we differ from God in terms of degree. Like God, we also possess power or knowledge. But *his* power and knowledge are *infinite* in degree. That's what makes him different.

- ❖ **But when it comes to omnipresence, we differ from God – not just in degree – but in kind.** It's not that we're located in one place while he's located in an infinite number of places. That would be a difference in degree.
 - **No, for God to be omnipresent means that ultimately he exists *no* where.** Because "where" assumes a location within space. But the point of omnipresence is that God is *not* contained in *any* space – even an infinite number of spaces. **In other words, you simply can't define his essence in spatial terms.**

- ❖ Listen to King Solomon in **1 Kings 8:27**. He had just finished building for God the temple in Jerusalem, but he's still baffled at the thought of the omnipresent God residing in a building. *"But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built!"*
 - The heavens can't contain God. Not because they're not big enough to hold him. **"Big enough" is not even a category that applies to an omnipresent God.** Again, he's not spatial. He exists without size or spatial dimensions.

- ❖ So when we speak of God being everywhere we have to be clear. We're not suggesting that he's just infinitely larger than us. That he takes up infinitely more space than us. No, God exists apart from space. Just as we argued previously that he exists apart from time. **By virtue of being the Creator of the universe, he preexists both space and time.**
 - But just as we said God is still able to interact with us *in* time, he's able to interact with us *in* space. That's why we can still rightly speak of him being everywhere – in every space. We just have to remember that he ultimately cannot be defined in spatial terms. So keeping that in mind, we can define it this way: **God is omnipresent in that he is fully present everywhere all at once; and yet his presence can be experienced differently in different places.**

- ❖ **In other words, wherever you are, where you go, God is there in his fullness.** He is everywhere all at once. And yet, at the same time, we can speak of God appearing in a specific place – like a burning bush or a pillar of fire. Or we can speak of God dwelling in a tabernacle in the wilderness; or in the temple in Jerusalem; or in the hearts of believers. He is everywhere all at once; and yet he can be experienced differently in different places.

Demonstrating God's Omnipresence

- ❖ That's what it means for God to be omnipresent. Now let's demonstrate this in Scripture. Turn with me to Psalm 139, a psalm of King David. **Now the overall theme of the psalm is God's knowledge – his intimate, personal knowledge of every single one of us.** Listen to v1, *"O LORD, you have searched me and known me!"* David goes on to marvel in the vastness of God's knowledge. **He knows everything there is to know about you.** *"⁴Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether. . . . ⁶Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it."*

- ❖ **Now in vv7-12, David highlights God’s omnipresence and says there is nowhere you can go to escape this knowledge or to be beyond its reach.** Listen again starting in v7, “*7Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? 8If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! 9If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, 10even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. 11If I say, “Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night,” 12even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you.*”
 - David is not saying that, no matter where he tries to go, the LORD just so happens to be there too. **No, his point is that there is no where you can go where God is not present.** By his very nature, he is inescapable. You’re always in his presence wherever you go. Ascend to heaven, he’s there. Go down to hell (or to *Sheol* the realm of the dead) and he’s there. Go to the wings of the morning (where the sun rises – the farthest east you can), he’s there. Or go to the uttermost parts of the sea (to the far end of the Mediterranean Sea – the farthest west you can go) and God is there. Even in the darkest of night, he is there. For darkness is as light in God’s presence.

- ❖ **I think it’s unfortunate that some read this as if it were a threat.** As if David is trying to flee from God’s presence out of guilt or shame, and now he’s bemoaning that there’s nowhere to escape. But that totally misses the tone of this psalm. David is expressing a sense of assurance as he contemplates God’s omnipresence. Look at v10, “*even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.*” **It’s a comfort to know that wherever you go – wherever you are – God’s ever-present hand is there to lead you and uphold you.**
 - And then in vv13-16 (which we didn’t read), **David marvels at how – even in the darkest, most personal, most hidden place – in my mother’s womb, LORD, you knew me.** All of that is meant to say that God is fully present everywhere all at once. And that ought to bring you comfort. Because no matter how far you travel in life; no matter how alone you might be; no matter how much it feels like no one really knows you – God does. God’s knowledge of you is as vast as he is omnipresent. **To King David, omnipresence is not some esoteric doctrine. It’s a comforting truth.**

- ❖ **If we turn to the pages of the NT, the Apostle Paul also marvels at the omnipresence of the LORD.** In Acts 17:24-27, in his speech to the men of Athens, he begins by stressing God’s lordship. “*24The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man.*” And concludes with a logical implication, that is, God’s omnipresence. “*27that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us.*”
 - **In other words, by virtue of being the Creator and Lord of all, he is not bound by any spatial limits.** He is omnipresent. **And for that reason, all peoples on the face of the earth are able to seek and find God.** Because “*he is actually not far from each one of us.*” Again, this is *not* a doctrine meant to puff up our knowledge. It’s a biblical truth intended to motivate our missions. To move us to tell those who feel the furthest from God that he’s actually not far at all.

- ❖ That's what understanding his omnipresence is supposed to do. This is not just an intellectual exercise. **This is meant to *comfort* you – knowing God is always present no matter where you go or how distant you feel – and to *challenge* you to tell that to others who feel the same.** That's the point when we say that God is fully present everywhere all at once. So we covered the first half of our definition of God's omnipresence.
- ❖ Now let's dig deeper into what it means for his presence to be experienced differently in different places. What does that mean exactly and where is it affirmed in Scripture? Think about it this way. **Though God is everywhere all at once, there are instances in Scripture where God is uniquely present to bless.** That's what Psalm 16:11 tries to convey, "*You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy.*"
 - Or what's communicated in the Aaronic blessing found in Numbers 6:24-26, "*²⁴The LORD bless you and keep you; ²⁵the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; ²⁶the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.*" **So while God is always everywhere all at once, we should long for that unique experience (blessing) of being in his presence and having his face shine upon you.**
 - This is how we understand the recorded appearances of God whether at the burning bush (Ex 3:2) or when it says he sits above the mercy seat, enthroned on the ark of the covenant in the Holy of Holies (Ex 25:22). He's everywhere. But in that particular place, he's uniquely present to bless his people.
- ❖ **This idea of the omnipresent God being uniquely present in one particular place in order to bless helps make sense of heaven.** We would normally say that God is in heaven. But what does that really mean if he's actually everywhere? So is it right to say that God is in heaven? **Well let's first consider a few texts that do say God is in heaven.** Psalm 11:4, "*The LORD is in his holy temple; the LORD's throne is in heaven.*" Psalm 33:13, "*The LORD looks down from heaven; he sees all the children of man.*"
 - So the LORD is in heaven, but we don't want to suggest that God is *more* present in heaven than on earth. Because, as we've said, he's fully present everywhere all at once. **But it's fair to say that, in heaven, his presence is supremely experienced in terms of blessing.** Because there's no sin in heaven. Nothing hindering one's communion with God. So while he's fully present everywhere, he's experienced differently in heaven. His presence is experienced solely in terms of blessing.
- ❖ Now there's a flip side to this. **While God is everywhere all at once, he can be uniquely present – not just to bless – but at times to punish or to curse.** Just as there are passages that speak of God turning his face toward you in blessing, there are Scriptures that speak of God removing his presence or hiding his face in judgment. As a way to punish.
 - Listen to Isaiah 59:2, "*but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.*" Or Proverbs 15:29, "*The LORD is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayer of the righteous.*" That's not a refutation of his omnipresence. **God being far from the wicked and yet close to the righteous – is a moral statement.**

- ❖ **It's describing a relational distance between God and the wicked.** It's no different than how we speak of a married couple being far from each other even as they lie in the same bed. You can be physically present while relationally distant. That's the message being sent whenever God removes his presence from some place – like in Ezekiel 10 when he removes his presence (his *Shekinah* glory) from the temple in Jerusalem. It's not a literal description. It's a moral judgment.

- ❖ **This idea helps make sense of God's presence in relationship to hell.** It's quite common to speak of hell as a place of punishment where unrepentant sinners are *separated from* God. Well, now we know not to take that literally. As if God is literally absent from hell. But to understand that as moral language, describing a permanent relational distance established between God and those suffering in hell.
 - **In fact, far from describing God as being absent from hell, Scripture actually speaks of God being present with the wicked in judgment.** Like we said, sometimes God can be uniquely present to punish. Listen to Amos 9:2, as God describes his dogged pursuit of the wicked, *“If they dig into Sheol, from there shall my hand take them; if they climb up to heaven, from there I will bring them down.”* Or a similar text in Jeremiah 23:23-24, *“²³Am I a God at hand, declares the LORD, and not a God far away? ²⁴Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the LORD. Do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the LORD.”*
 - Now these are examples of God's omnipresence referenced as part of a threat or warning to sinners. He is everywhere all at once, which means, as an unrepentant sinner, you must realize you can't escape his judgment.

- ❖ In fact, even in hell, you can't escape God's presence. **There it's experienced solely in terms of punishment.** Listen to Revelation 14:10, *“he [referring to the unrepentant sinner in hell] also will drink the wine of 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.”*
 - **Sinners who do not turn to Jesus for salvation – who do not repent of their sins – will be tormented “in the presence of the Lamb.”** In the presence of Jesus! The Son of God is omnipresent. Meaning he is fully present everywhere – including hell. But in that dreaded place, his presence is experienced solely in terms of punishment. That's the one place in the world where you don't want to be in the presence of God.

Drawing Implications of God's Omnipresence

- ❖ So we've defined God's omnipresence and demonstrated where this doctrine is taught in Scripture. Now let's draw out some implications of God's omnipresence for us. I have three implications for you to consider.

- ❖ **First, God's omnipresence is comforting to the saved.** We already saw this confirmed in Psalm 139. Wherever you are, wherever you go, the omnipresent God with his omnipresent hand will be there to guide you and uphold you. That's a comforting thought. That is, if you're sure that he's uniquely present in your life – not to *punish* – but to *bless*.
 - That's why I said God's omnipresence is comforting *to the saved*. Because when we speak of being saved, we mean being saved from the punishment of your sins. If you trust in Jesus as the One who came to die for your sins – to take the punishment you deserve and bear it on the cross – then the gift of salvation is yours.
 - From that day forth, you are loved by God as much as he loves his only Son. His face will never be hidden from you. **Wherever you go, he will be there to shine his face upon you and bless you.** That's the kind of assurance that the saved can derive from meditating on God's omnipresence.

- ❖ Let's go further. **Think about the comfort in knowing God is fully present wherever you are.** You have immediate access to him. You don't need to wait in line to communicate with him. He'll never put you on hold.
 - **You always have his undivided attention.** He doesn't have to split his attention between you and billions of other believers. He's not like us when we're trying to listen to multiple kids in the car talking over each other to get our attention. God is fully present everywhere. **So when you're engaged with him in prayer, you get all of him.** All his attention. He is fully present to listen as you pray. That's the comfort his children enjoy. The children of an omnipresent God. That's our first implication.

- ❖ **Second, God's omnipresence is chilling for the unsaved.** If you have not repented of your sins, if you have not turned to Jesus for salvation, then omnipresence should be a scary doctrine. Because, as we saw in Psalm 139, just as God is everywhere, so is his knowledge. **Which means nothing we think or do is ever done in secret.**
 - Sure, we can hide ourselves from others and do things in secret. Other people may never know. They'll never find out. But not God. Nothing is hidden from God. Now that's a chilling thought for anyone. But at least for those who have been forgiven of their sins, we can be comforted knowing that God still loves us – even as he knows everything we do in the dark and everything we think or feel in the secret recesses of our hearts. He loves us still.
 - **And, at the same time, this truth convicts us to live honestly and openly.** Never trying to hide our sin or shame. Since we know it's a futile effort. God always knows. Because God is always there.

- ❖ **But if you don't know God's love – if you haven't received his forgiveness – then his omnipresence is a terrifying thought.** Because it means you have no place to hide from him. You can try to ignore his presence. But he's still there. Wherever you go, he's there. As we said earlier, even in hell you won't escape God. Even there you will forever be before him – experiencing his presence solely in terms of punishment.

- Trust me, that's not what you want. So don't stay on the same path you've been on. Make a change. **Decide this very day to turn to Jesus.** To receive the forgiveness and gift of salvation that he made possible for all who believe.
 - Now to help you do that let's look at our third and final implication, which relates to Jesus himself.

- ❖ **Third, God's omnipresence is confounding in the person of Christ.** I hope that God's omnipresence is starting to make more sense to you. But once you begin to contemplate the person of Christ – it confounds everything! Because we've been saying God is fully present everywhere all at once. With no spatial limits or boundaries. He's omnipresent.
 - And yet earlier, we were singing songs about Christ – the Second Person of the Trinity – being born in Bethlehem, located specifically in a manger. How can he be both? **How can the eternal, omnipresent God of the universe enter into creation and bind himself to a human body in its smallest, feeblest of forms?** As a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths? How is that possible?

- ❖ **The Incarnation is both the greatest miracle and the greatest mystery in the universe.** Don't worry if you can't fully grasp it. In fact, the presence of mystery in your faith should encourage you. Because it's more likely that you're dealing with the real God of the universe.
 - Just consider the alternative. What if there was no mystery in God? What if you could perfectly comprehend his nature? **If that were so, then you'd have to wonder: Would he really be a God worthy of your worship?**

- ❖ I want to worship a God who is infinitely greater than me. A God I can't fully wrap my mind around. So when you tell me that the Omnipresent became Incarnate – the God who is everywhere all at once is now *Emmanuel*, God with us in one body – **it's this beautiful mystery of the Incarnation that offers the strongest assurance that *this* Jesus is the true God of the universe.** Such mystery shouldn't leave us flustered in frustration. It should lead us on our knees in worship.