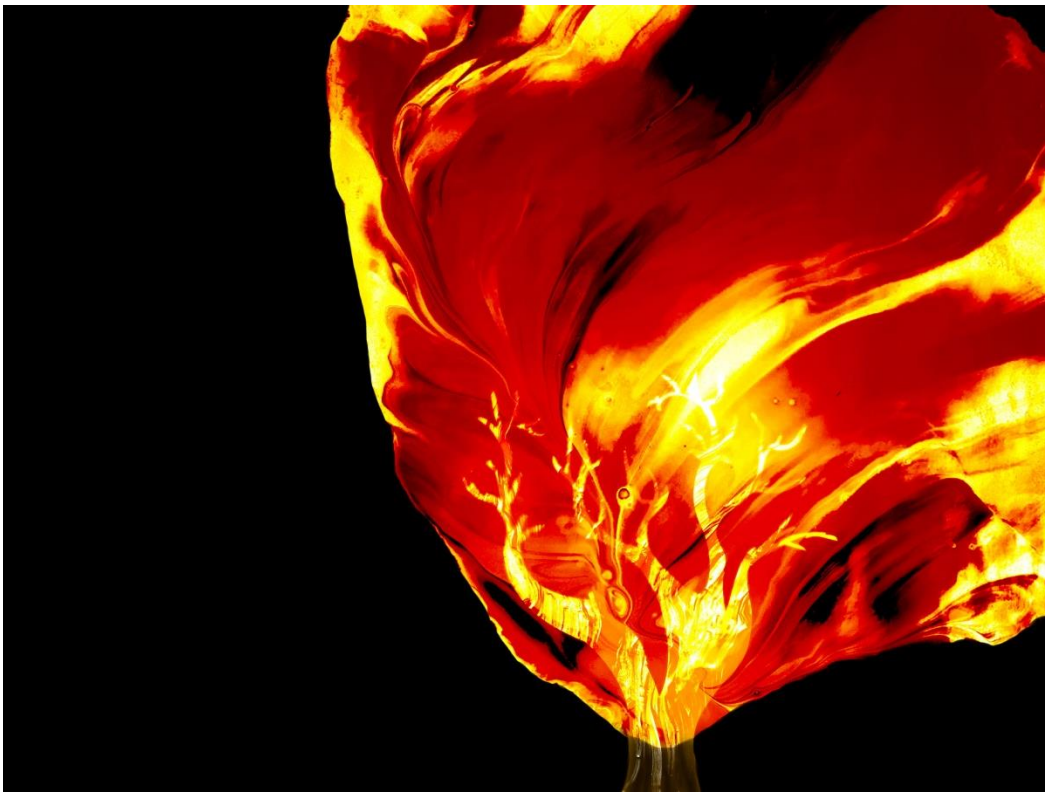


DIVINE ENCOUNTERS



*What can happen in a
moment with God...*

by David Legge

preachthnewword.com



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Divine Encounters - Chapter 1

"Moses At The Burning Bush"

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Thank you very much, Philip. Hi everybody, it's good to be with you again in Loughbrickland. Thank you for coming, I know most of you are regulars - but if you haven't been here before, you're very welcome and we're glad to see you. I want you to turn with me in your Bibles to Exodus chapter 3. Before we read we're going to pray, but you get the portion of Scripture - Exodus chapter 3. Let's pray together, and I want you to pray for yourself, that the Lord indeed will meet you, encounter you tonight, and do a mighty work.

Father, we come before You, and we thank You for the note of praise. We thank You, Lord, that You are worthy to be praised, You are holy, You are mighty, You are the transcendent God. You're far above anything that we could ever conceive or truly know, and yet we can come and call You 'Father', through the Spirit of adoption, through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, His intercessory ministry, we can come right into the Holy of Holies by the blood of Jesus, and we can be face-to-face with God. Lord, we really - certainly, I don't know the true extent of what I should know regarding intimacy with You, but I pray tonight that all of us will have, as it were, our appetites whet as we consider what men and women of God in bygone eras, biblically speaking, how they encountered You, and how those personal encounters changed their lives - and not only changed their lives, but changed their nations and changed the world. We pray tonight, Lord, that You would cause what we celebrate in the past to become something that is present, actual, and real to us - that You will meet us individually, and that You will meet us together tonight as a group. Lord, we long to meet You, so come into our midst and minister to us now, in Jesus' name, Amen.

I think it was a week or two ago, Jim was asking me what I was going to do as a series this year, and I hadn't really much of a notion - but I do now, you'll be glad to know! Just as the screen shows you, we're going to consider 'Divine Encounters', what can happen in a moment with God. Tonight we're looking, in our first study, at 'Moses at the Burning Bush'. So we're reading verse 1 of Exodus chapter 3: *"Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. And he led the flock to the back of the desert, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. And the Angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed. Then Moses said, 'I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn'. So when the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, 'Moses, Moses!' And he said, 'Here I am'. Then He said, 'Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground'. Moreover 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 upon God. And the LORD said: 'I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and large land, to a land*

flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites. Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel has come to Me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them'" - and we will end our reading there at verse 9.

What we're going to be considering these nights, each month, are what you could call 'close encounters of the divine kind'. We're going to be looking at well-known stories of the Bible, like this one of Moses at the burning bush, but purely from a perspective of personal encounters with God. We will be isolating and analysing the moment that these men, and sometimes women, had as they encountered the Lord - we might say, as they are surprised by the Living God, as they have a brush with the Almighty, as they come face-to-face with the Divine - or, to put it another way, as they experience God. If we believe in a personal God - and we do - we must expect personal encounters with Him, yes? If we believe Christianity is primarily a relationship, rather than merely a religion, then we must welcome encounters with our God.

A life without personal experiences would be less than half a life, would you agree? So a Christian life without personal experiences of God, would be half a Christian life. A Christian life without experiences would be a very boring Christian life, just as a human life without experiences would be boring. Christianity is not boring, it's not meant to be boring, God never designed it to be so. You see, our existence as born-again Christians is that we should know God the Father, through Jesus Christ, His Son, by the power of the Holy Spirit. It's a relationship with the Godhead, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. One Christian writer put it like this: 'There is nothing to replace personal encounter. Everyone must have their own. Just as authority comes in the commission, so power comes in the encounter'. So the authority comes to go into all the world and preach the Gospel, but the power comes through encounter with God. He goes on: 'We see it in Jesus' life, and so it is for the disciples, and it's no different for us. There is nothing that training, study, or association with the right people can do to make up for this one thing - the need to have a personal encounter with God. That is what builds our personal history'. Now listen to this statement he makes: 'We must encounter One who is bigger than we are in every possible way until He leaves a mark'. Let me repeat that: 'We must encounter One who is bigger than we are in every possible way until He leaves a mark. It is wonderful, glorious, and scary'.

Now I'm not so much preaching from having great experiences with God. I have had some, but rather I'm preaching from the position of pursuit of more Divine encounters. What I want to share with you tonight in particular from Moses and the burning bush are lessons that help us on the way to encountering God, pointers that will position us, that will give us a posture to welcome Divine experience. It says of Moses, I was reading this just yesterday, at the end of the Torah, the first five books of the Bible, the very end of the book of Deuteronomy, it says of Moses in summary: 'But since then there has not arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face'. That's the relationship Moses had with God! I think it really started here at the burning bush.

Now, don't panic, but I'm going to give you ten pointers from this story on how to position yourself to have a Divine encounter. It would be good if you could note them down, otherwise get the CD later on. The first is: a wilderness preceded Moses' Divine encounter. A wilderness preceded it. You know the story, don't you? When he is forty

years of age he takes it upon himself, with the arm of flesh, to bring deliverance to the Israelites. He slays the Egyptian, buries him, and then he flees into the Midianite wilderness. So at that moment, he knew he was going to be God's deliverer - but now he faces disappointment. It's as if this man has missed his call, the call of God upon his life. I believe his mother was whispering in his ear - remember she was like a nanny to him, she was looking after him for Pharaoh's daughter - I believe she was telling him what his true identity was, and that God had called him, preserved him as a child, and he was going to be the deliverer. But in the attitude of flesh, he tried to execute the will of God, and here he is: disappointed, dejected, he's missed his call, he feels like a failure - but it was this wilderness that paved the way for his Divine encounter. Is that not encouraging, wherever you find yourself tonight? For forty years, that happened when he was forty, now he's eighty; for forty years he was nowhere, backside of the desert - a nobody nowhere - but do you know what all that was? That forty years was preparation for the forty years he would lead God's people through their wilderness. He's eighty years of age, I don't know if there's anybody that age here tonight, I'm not asking you to tell us, but many a person, when they had that number, would think: 'There isn't anything I could do for God now!' - but isn't it wonderful that the promise of Pentecost from Joel 2 received in Acts chapter 2 is that young men will see visions, and old men will dream dreams. God is a non-respecter of age groups. When the Holy Spirit is poured out, His Holy Spirit is poured out on all flesh.

So, I'm telling you tonight, whatever you've gone through in your wilderness experience, it has not been wasted time - far from it. Because God, as we see here, God can ignite your wilderness experience. In fact, like Moses, you'll be able to minister to those who have been through your own journey. Forty years in his personal wilderness, to prepare him to lead God's people through forty years of their wilderness. So, be encouraged tonight: a wilderness preceded Moses' Divine encounter - and that might be exactly where you find yourself tonight, but that can all change in a moment.

The second thing is, as we find Moses here in verse 1, he was faithful in little things, faithful in little things. If you look at verse 1, it says: 'He was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law', so it appears that he hadn't even a flock of his own. At eighty years of age, that's something, isn't it? He seems to have been content, maybe we might say humble enough, to just look after his father-in-law's flock without having to have anything of his own. It would also indicate, perhaps, that he was submissive to Jethro as his father-in-law. Or, to put it another way, he had become, he had learned to be submissive to another's vision - that's an interesting thing. To put it another way, he was learning to be a son before he would graduate as a father of the nation. Do you know that leaders have to learn to serve before they can lead? Now, there should be a thing called 'servant-leadership', when you're a leader you should always be serving anyway - but you understand, we've got to be able to be submissive to someone else's vision who is leading for God, before we can take it on ourselves. Sometimes people who feel the calling of leadership can't do that, they want to get at it right away - it's interesting, isn't it? This was part of the road that paved the way to Moses' Divine encounter. It was incredible, it was a low road, a wilderness road, a road of humility, a road of submission.

But see something else: he was obviously about his daily business, wasn't he? He was faithful in the little things of everyday duties. I don't know what you think, but when I read the Bible, as far as I can see, God never calls lazy people. I'm thinking of Elisha,

do you remember Elijah came down and put the mantle upon Elisha and anointed him as the next prophet, but what was he doing when he found him? He was out ploughing the field, he was busy. The call of God was on his life, but he was at work. I was reading today about Joshua, who came right after Moses to lead God's people into the promised land, but Joshua served Moses faithfully, by his side for years. That qualified him to lead God's people. You see, being faithful in what you do today gets you ready for what God is preparing for you tomorrow. Have you ever heard the saying: 'If you want to get someone to do something, get someone who is busy'? Well, that's the way God thinks too. Luke chapter 16 verse 10: 'He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much'. Matthew 25:21: 'You were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord'.

My friend Brendan Jones down in Enniskillen has a picture on his kitchen wall with a saying on it, and it says: 'Enjoy the little things in life, for one day you will look back and realise they were the big things'. I love that. Enjoy the little things in life, because you'll look back one day and discover those were the big things. Well, you see, in the kingdom of God the little things are the big things! When God was looking for a man who He could show up before and call to be a deliverer for His people, He looked for someone that was busy about doing something, faithful in the little things. But I don't want you to misunderstand what I'm saying tonight, because though he was busy - and this is the third thing - he dwelt in solitude. He learned to quieten his soul. Now, it may have been involuntary - in other words, he had to flee into the Midianite wilderness, it probably wouldn't have been his choice, living forty years out there in the desert - but, nevertheless, it was part of God's plan to get him into a place where he was ready for God to reveal Himself in this manner.

External and internal quiet are not the same, don't misunderstand me. Just because he was in a wilderness doesn't mean he was internally quiet before God, yet sometimes it is the case that outward quietness can creep into our soul, it can invade our hearts. The idea of solitude is that there comes a suspension of all the distractions that surround us: distractions of the body, the mind, the soul. When those distractions are suspended, then we become more responsive to a deep work of God, to the voice of God in our hearts. You see it with David, a shepherd as well, most of the Psalms, or many of them anyway that we get, I believe we got them from his time when he was out as a shepherd. One thing you can do to position yourself to experience God in a life-changing way is to de-clutter your life. Now I'm not contradicting myself - a few moments ago I talked about God not calling lazy people, and to be about your business, and to be faithful in little things - this is not a contradiction. What I'm saying is: you've got to get on with life's responsibility, but leave always an opening for God to speak to your heart - do you understand? It's not either or, it's both and.

You see, our fear of being alone drives us to noise and crowds, doesn't it? Have you heard of 'FOMO'? Text language apparently, 'Fear Of Missing Out'. We've all got that, when we withdraw from the crowd into solitude before God, we're afraid of missing something. We are maybe afraid of our own company, or the Lord's company, I don't know. But when we look at our Lord Jesus Christ, we see that this was His pattern, He went into the desert, He went into the hill country, He went into the mountains, He went a great while before day, He spent all night in that place. After healing and preaching, the disciples were called by the Lord Jesus in Mark 6 verse 31, He said to them: 'Come away by yourselves to a lonely place'. He was teaching them that there had to come into their life, diet, their calendar experience of ministry before God, a

moment where they are free from the bondage of people and ministry - solitude.

Moses learned to quieten his soul. A great old saint of God once said: 'Without solitude it is virtually impossible to live a spiritual life'. Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6:6: 'But you, when you pray, go into your room', or closet, 'and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly'. Closet, secret, open reward - that's the pattern. You see, some of us want great encounters with God, but we're not prepared to be alone with God. It's not going to work, I'm sorry. God sometimes does show up and surprise people, but that is the exception rather than the rule. If you want to position yourself into a posture where God is - and I say this reverently, but I know what I'm saying - where you're setting God up for a meeting, you need to learn to quieten your soul. You need to have a closet.

The fourth thing is that he went to a place marked by God. So wilderness preceded it, he was faithful in the little things, he had learned to quieten his soul, but he went to a place marked by God. Look at verse 1: 'He came to Horeb, the mountain of God'. Now Horeb, that's Mount Sinai, same place. It's called 'the mountain of God', now I grant you that that is probably in hindsight that it is called 'the mountain of God', because Sinai would become a place of great significance where Moses would have many encounters with God, as well as the Israelites. But I just wonder, while Moses was wandering around the desert, had he already started talking to God in that place? Had it become a trysting place? Can I encourage you not to be legalistic about this, but it is good to have a time and place where you meet with God. One thing is absolutely certain: when God showed up with this Divine encounter in the burning bush, this place became holy ground - isn't that right? Didn't the Lord tell him: 'Take your shoes off your feet'? This mountain became sanctified in that Divine moment, and it's incredible to me that God's presence actually changes ground!

I believe that this mountain, whether it was in hindsight that it was called 'the mountain of God', was marked out by God to meet Moses there not only this time, but many times thereafter. Can I say that there is a principle here: there are certain places and there are certain people who are marked by God, and if you want to have Divine encounters, I would encourage you to seek them out - places and people marked by God. This is a trend throughout revival, you know. I remember years ago preaching on the 1859 revival, and I remember saying that (and it was a dig, by the way, at modern revival movements), I basically said that they didn't run to America to get the blessing, whatever the blessing was, they went straight to God and got it. Can I tell you, I was wrong? Because in 1859, what many people don't know is that what precipitated the Ulster revival was a revival that was already taking place in the United States and in other places in the UK. One significant aspect in the States was a prayer meeting of 12,000 businessmen in New York City, 'Fulton Street Prayer Meeting' it was called, and they were praying for a move of God across the world. Two men from Ulster, Dr William Gibson, some of you may have heard of him - he wrote the book 'The Year of Grace', the history of the Ulster revival - he, who became the moderator of the Presbyterian Church later, and the Rev William McClure, both of them visited that prayer meeting. It is reported that when they came back and gave the account of what was going on there, that their testimony ignited something in the hearers and the move of God was beginning. Can I tell you: that has been the way revival has moved. The spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus. You look at the 1859 revival around Ulster, and you will find that it did not move by the clergy, it didn't primarily move by

the evangelists, it moved by the new converts as they took the testimony of what God had done in their hometown or their church to the next village. Sometimes we need to go places God is at work and go to people He is working through. Often when people heard of a move of God, they went to see, they caught something and they carried it back with them.

Moses went to a place that had been marked out by God for him. Fifthly, I want you to see: angelic ministry was involved. Verse 2: 'The Angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush' - the Angel of the LORD. Now we have got to - this is a fact - acknowledge that sometimes Divine encounters with God come via angels. Hebrews chapter 1 and verse 14 says that angels are 'ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation'. Now I know here that it's capital 'A', and this is most likely a pre-incarnate appearance of the Word of God, the Son of God, the second Person of the Trinity, our Lord Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, He's appearing as an Angel. All of a sudden we panic, because we don't want to get into New Age Angelology, and we don't want to be worshipping angels, and we don't want to be talking to angels or anything like that. I'm with you on that, but you've got to understand that when God is doing things, often He sends angels to do His bidding. If you're closed to that, you're going to be closed to an awful lot of what God does. This is not exact, but there are around 270 mentions of angels or the angelic within the whole of Scripture - because these are the forms, the beings that He sends to do His work. Hebrews says they are the ones who minister to us - so if you're shut down to receiving angels or angelic help, you're shutting yourself down to a great degree of Divine encounters.

The angelic was involved with Moses' encounter at the burning bush. Then sixthly: this Divine encounter was mysterious in nature. It doesn't make sense, does it? Look at it, verse 2: 'the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed'. Now, Christians have an irrepressible need to explain everything, don't they? Especially with the Bible, they want to be able to explain everything with the Bible. Some of them have a list of biblical experiences that we can have - are you one of those people? 'Oh, I don't see any experience like that in the Bible'. Well, can I challenge you first of all, before I say anything else about the mysterious nature of Moses' encounter with God here, can I ask you: do you truly believe the possibility of having those same encounters today that you find in your biblical list? Do you really? Dr Michael Brown, a theologian and preacher and radio host, a pastor said to him: 'If it's not in the Bible, I don't believe it'. Dr Brown retorted back to him: 'Well, my position is a wee bit different: if it is in the Bible, I do believe it'. Do you see what he was getting at? There was a lot that that pastor actually didn't believe that was already in the Scriptures. But I ask you further: is God confined to the list of biblical experience that you have in this book? Now you think: 'Oh, well you're getting on dangerous ground now'. I'm asking you it again: is God confined only to the biblical experiences that you read about in this book? The burning bush never happened before Exodus 3, and it never happened after. In fact, you look at the Divine encounters that we have, and the ones we're going to look at month after month, and you will find that they are unique, they are original, why? Because that's the way God is - He tends to do things unique and original.

Yet some of us are confining God to the experiences that He uniquely gave other people in the world. Now, why are we doing that? The reason why some of you are thinking 'Oh, you're on dangerous ground now', fear, panic! What we need to realise -

you see, all of these manifestations, the burning bush or whatever else we're going to look at these nights; these manifestations do not contain God, they reveal God, but they don't contain Him. They are not God. They show that God is around - there is a word for that, 'Shekinah' glory. It comes from the root Hebrew word for 'dwelling', and it's often manifest, the dwelling of God, His presence is manifest as He tabernacles among us through fire, through light, through smoke, cloud, darkness, a voice - we could go on with various figures of His presence. But God is not the pillar of fire, God is not the pillar of cloud, God is not a burning bush - though He was in the burning bush - it reveals His presence. So God cannot be confined to any of these things. I say it, and I believe it with all my heart, God cannot be confined to the Bible. I know some people would just go nuts at me saying that. He will never contradict what is in the Bible, of course He won't, but if you confine God to His own book, you have eradicated the majority of the things that happened in historical revivals - because a lot of things you'll not find in the Bible.

God is the God of the new thing, even the Bible doesn't confine God. You know I believe the Bible, and I preach the Bible, and I live by the Bible, and I study this book every day of my life - but I don't worship the Bible. I don't worship Father, Son, and Holy Scriptures - beyond the sacred page I seek Thee, Lord. My spirit pants for Thee, the Living Word. I read a quote today of Andrew Murray, he said: 'Beware in your prayers, above everything else, of limiting God, not only by unbelief, but by fancying that you know what He can do'. Not just limiting God by unbelief, but fancying that you know what He can do. God help us, some of us have become policemen for God: telling God what He can and He cannot do - isn't that incredible?

It was mysterious in nature, and if you're going to have a God-encounter, can I encourage you: don't try to work it all out. Somebody said, and I'll pay for this, 'You can't kiss your girl and think about it at the same time!'. Do you understand what I mean? When you're having an experience, it's not about the brain, it's about the heart.

Seventh: his curiosity drew God. Now, look at this, verse 2 says the fire was coming: 'from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed'. Verse 3, 'Then Moses said, 'I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn''. His curiosity drew God. So, he sees something, he's now having his Divine encounter, it's mysterious, and his brain is trying to work out what's happening here - but it's a God thing, so it doesn't make sense. Fire burns, doesn't it? This fire didn't burn. So when you try to make sense of God, you try to make sense of what God does, you're on a road to nothing! But he actually starts now to study the supernatural mystery of God. Can I encourage you to do that? Study the supernatural mysteries of God - not to understand them, but in order to be in awe and wonder, love and praise at what a great God we have. You know, the more I learn, the more I realise how little I know - does anybody else feel like that? The more I learn, the more I realise how little I know, especially when I study the mysteries of the supernatural works of God. People say: 'Oh, be careful, this is very dangerous - it's real dangerous, this tonight. Deuteronomy 29:29, oh be careful, the secret things belong unto our God' - yes! Quote the rest! 'But that which is revealed is to us, to our children's children' - study what is revealed of the mysterious encounters of men and women with God. Look at it! Learn from it! 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has it entered into the heart of man what God has prepared for those that love Him' - so close the book and forget about it, we can never know anything? Read on! 'But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit

searches all things, yes, the deep things of God'. The natural man does not perceive the things of the Spirit, but God reveals them to us.

Do you know what you need? You need to have a curiosity. I'm very curious about things, sometimes I've been curious about the wrong things - but if we would turn our curiosity toward God, we would find God would turn toward us, because that's exactly what happens here. You look at it, verse 4, look at this: 'So when the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, 'Moses, Moses!'. Do you see it? What if he hadn't turned aside? I'll tell you, I believe if he hadn't turned aside, God would not have turned toward him, and God would not have called 'Moses, Moses!'. He wouldn't have got the call. To put it in my terms: if you're not looking for it, or looking into it, it's unlikely that you'll end up looking at it. Did you get that? If you're not looking into it, or looking for it, it's unlikely that one day you'll be looking at it. So people go along their merry way, their daily business, totally oblivious to any thought of God, or they're not seeking God, they're not yearning after God, they're not quieting their soul to hear God or to see God, they're not going to places that have been marked by God, they're not searching out men and women marked by God - but they expect God to just show up some day in a burning bush. It could happen, but it's very unlikely that will happen - there is a posturing and a positioning. His curiosity drew God. Can I encourage you to be curious about the things of God?

Number eight: he possessed the fear of the LORD. Look at verse 5, 'Then [the LORD] said, 'Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground'. Moreover 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 upon God'. Moses takes his shoes off, he hides his face, afraid to look - do you know what he was doing? He was reverencing God when there was no one else around - do you do that? Now I'm a firm believer in 'Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless His holy name'. So, not doing it in the flesh, but in the spirit, if you want to raise your hands, if you want to fall on your belly, if you want to get down on your knees, I think it would be good for us to practice that more often - but sometimes we do that in a public space, but we don't do it at home when it's just you and me and God. Do we reverence God when it's only us and no one else is looking?

Look at chapter 20, keep your finger there in our passage, look at chapter 20. Moses possessed the true fear of the LORD, chapter 20 is where he comes to Sinai again and the Law is given, 'The Ten Commandments' we call it. Look at verse 20 of chapter 20: 'Moses said to the people, 'Do not fear; for God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin'. Now is that not a contradiction? 'Do not fear; for God has come to test you, to see that His fear is before you'. Well, they are two different types of fear. One is the wrong fear, fleshly fear, the fear of God in a wrong sense, to be afraid of Him; and then the second fear is a true fear of God. You can actually see this, because the wrong kind of fear that the Israelites possessed caused them to hide from God. God wanted to speak to them, God wanted to draw them near, but they were afraid because of the thunder and lightning - this was a test. God wasn't trying to drive them away, God was trying to sift out those who truly wanted to hear His voice and were prepared to die out and go through with God, even if it meant losing their lives. It was only Moses understood the heart of God, because he had a true fear of God in purity and reverence to draw near to the LORD. It was the fireworks on the mountain that exposed the fact that Moses was the only one who

understood and possessed the true fear of the Lord.

Listen: I believe he possessed it at the burning bush. He took his shoes from off his feet, I know God told him to do it, but he hid his face - afraid to look upon God. If we would have the fear of the LORD like that, I'm not talking about moving around with long faces and afraid to say 'Boo' to anybody. I'm not talking about that, I'm not talking about a fuddy-duddy legalism or an old stuffy religiosity, I'm not talking about that. I'm not talking about putting the fear of God into people or into our children, I'm talking about a true, devoted, loving respect for our God. He had it, and that's what set him up for his encounter.

Number nine: this encounter brought a fresh revelation of God. Look at verse 6 of chapter 3, we've seen it, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and then look down, we didn't read these verses - the same chapter, verse 13: 'Then Moses said to God, 'Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you', and they say to me, 'What is His name?' what shall I say to them?'. And God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM'. And He said, 'Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you''. Moreover God said to Moses, 'Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: 'The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is My name forever, and this is My memorial to all generations''. They had never known the name of God like this before, never! True learning comes in experience, do you know that? You can read all the books in the world about anything, a trade, or a profession, a practice, but true learning only comes from experience. Tragically many stop short of Divine encounter because they're satisfied with good theology, good doctrine, good teaching, or good church practice. But in every Divine encounter there will be brought a fresh revelation of God, who God is, what God is like, what is in God's heart towards His people - 'I have heard the oppression of My people, I have seen it, heard their cries, and I have come down'. There will be a prophetic revelation of what God is doing on the earth when we have a Divine encounter. You will know God better, you will know God in a way that you never knew Him before, you'll know something about Him that you never knew before.

That brings us to the final point: this Divine encounter effected the deliverance of a nation. It effected the deliverance of a nation - Divine encounters are not for your selfish indulgence. So here in this message, and this series, you know, the objective is not that you go away and - whilst I want you to be curious and pursuing this - it's not for your own gratification to be able to say: 'Oh, I had a wonderful touchy-feely experience with God'. Whilst that can be good in and of itself, that is not the end result. This is not a charismatic collector's item, having a Divine encounter with God - encounters are to equip us to be something for God! Divine encounters have a redemptive purpose. This encounter of Moses at the burning bush, it effected the deliverance of a nation: 'I have seen the oppression of My people, I have heard their cries, I have come down to deliver them - it's time for Me to do something new on the earth'. Can I say, that is always the reason for Divine encounter: God is going to do something new. Acts chapter 1 verse 8: 'You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the world'. The Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost not just to give us thrills and spills, and we might get those on the way, but there is a purpose: to evangelise the world.

So, if you're not prepared to be anything for God, or do anything for God, don't expect a life changing encounter with God. God wanted to change a nation, and He did in His moment with this man. After the burning bush, God's relationship with Moses surpasses all other prophets. God knew him, as we saw from Deuteronomy 34 at the beginning, God knew him face-to-face - and actually God's glory rested upon his face. Moses was not focused on personal success, but on the God who could be known. Do you remember he said in Exodus 33:15: 'If Your presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here'? He preferred to be in the wilderness with God, than in the promised land without Him. It all started with his Divine encounter at the burning bush: when a wilderness preceded and paved the way; when God found him faithful in the little things; when he had learned to quieten his soul; when he tarried at a place was marked by God; when he was open to this angelic visitation; he marvelled at the mysteriousness of the ways of God; and he was curious, curious in a way that drew God to him, to turn towards him; he possessed the fear of the LORD, and it brought a unique revelation of God to him, and it changed a nation and delivered a people - and eventually it brought us a Saviour.

I was reading today, and with this I close, how Moses passed the baton on to Joshua - do you remember? Do you know what God said to Joshua in Joshua 1: 'No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you'. I ringed in my Bible those two phrases 'as I was with Moses', 'I will be with you'. Moses' experience can be our experience - not exactly, God's unique, but you can have your encounter with Him if you want it. Let's pray.

Let's take a moment or two in God's presence to still our hearts. What can happen in a moment with God can happen now, in this moment with God. I haven't mentioned sin really tonight, that's an obvious one: if sin is in the way, we need to repent; or unforgiveness, we need to forgive. Maybe God has spoken to you about your posture, your positioning before the Lord. You're not there, you've not shown to the Lord - what does He say? 'Those that seek Me will find Me, when they search for Me with all their heart'. 'The LORD said, 'Seek My face', and I said, 'Your face, O LORD, will I seek''. It's two-way, you see. Will you say to the Lord tonight - and don't say it if you don't mean it, OK, that would be worse than not saying it - so, is there something you need to do or say to God? I'm going to confess something to you tonight, OK? Stay in the attitude of prayer, I didn't know whether to share this or not - it's amazing where God speaks to you, you could be praying all day, and you're taking a shower and God speaks to you. I thought I may have to say this tonight, and one of the lines in the chorus we sang confirmed it. A month or two ago I was in church, some of you know that I have gone through a journey over many years - not least over the last 10 years - regarding the things of the Spirit in particular. There are things about God I never knew or experienced, that I have only experienced in the last 10 years - but God came to me in church. The preacher wasn't talking about this, it was the Holy Spirit came to me, and He said to me: 'You've lost your first love'. It wasn't so much that, it was: 'Do the things you loved at first', 'Do the things you did at first'. Do you know what God was saying to me? 'You've come into a newness about the things of the Spirit, and that's what I wanted for you etc etc, but you've lost some of your discipline, you've lost some of your tenacity, you've lost some of your perseverance'.

Is the Lord maybe coming to you and saying: 'Start doing the things you did at first, but do it with the anointing of God upon it, not in the flesh - do it with the anointing of

God upon it'. That will be explosive.

Father, I thank You for this word. I hardly know what to say, or how to pray. It's Your word, and I just leave it, I've delivered it, Lord, and I just leave it with You and with these folk. I thank You for them, and, Lord, I just pray that You will do what You want to do in their lives - whoever is listening to this recording, that You will do whatever You want to do. But, Lord, O God, my God, earnestly I seek You as in a dry and a thirsty land, where there is no water. O God, when shall I come and appear before God, the Living God? O, to see You in the sanctuary; O, to see You face-to-face. O Lord, we thank You for the gifts, we thank You for the anointing, but O for Your glory, O for Your manifest presence, O for Your Shekinah manifest presence. Lord, we long that You would show up in our lives, in our gatherings, in our communities. We declare that You are the same, Lord, as You have always been - but it's us that has changed. Lord, I repent, forgive us, Lord, and help us, give us grace to pursue You as the deer pants after the water brooks - that our soul may pant after You, O God. Thank You for Your word, apply it to all our hearts, Lord. We pray that You will continue with us tonight, Lord, let the seed of Your word not be lost, we pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

Divine Encounters - Chapter 2

"Jacob At Jabbok"

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I want you to turn with me in your Bibles to Genesis chapter 32, Genesis 32 for our reading. Genesis 32, and we are beginning to read at verse 22: *"And he", that is, Jacob, "arose that night and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven sons, and crossed over the ford of Jabbok. He took them, sent them over the brook, and sent over what he had. Then Jacob was left alone; and a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day. Now when He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him. And He said, 'Let Me go, for the day breaks'. But he said", that's Jacob said to the man, "'I will not let You go unless You bless me!'. So He said to him, 'What is your name?'. He said, 'Jacob'. And He said, 'Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed'. Then Jacob asked, saying, 'Tell me Your name, I pray'. And He said, 'Why is it that you ask about My name?'. And He blessed him there. And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: 'For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved'. Just as he crossed over Peniel the sun rose on him, and he limped on his hip. Therefore to this day the children of Israel do not eat the muscle that shrank, which is on the hip socket, because He touched the socket of Jacob's hip in the muscle that shrank".*

Let's pray together, and just as we come in an attitude of prayer, I would ask you to pray for yourself now that God would speak to you. Father, we come to You in the mighty, all-victorious name of the Lord Jesus. We've been singing already tonight of what a beautiful, wonderful, powerful name the name of Jesus is. We lift that name up, and we declare that that name is high over all. Lord, we just pray tonight, that the Lord Jesus Christ, Emmanuel, the Rose of Sharon, the Son of Man, the Son of God, the Good Shepherd, the Great Shepherd, the Chief Shepherd, the Gift of God, the Door to the Sheep, the Bread of Life, the Way and the Truth, that He might come His very self by the Spirit of God and minister to us, Father. We long to encounter You, so would You come tonight, Lord, and meet with us. In the mighty name of the Lord Jesus we ask it, Amen.

If you weren't with us last month, we commenced a series these - I nearly said Tuesday nights, I hardly know what day it is - Friday nights, the second Friday of the month here at Oasis in Loughbrickland, on 'Divine Encounters' - what can happen in a moment with God. We looked in our introductory night at 'Moses at the Burning Bush'. I'm not going to repeat that, I think the CDs are available there tonight if you want them. We're looking at close encounters of the divine kind, and as we look at some very well-known stories in the Bible, we're looking at them specifically from the perspective of personal encounters that men and women have had with the Almighty; where there has been a moment where they have been surprised by God Himself in person, where they have had a brush with the Lord, or they have come - and this is particular to tonight - face-to-face with God. These encounters where men and women actually experienced God - and we did highlight in introduction last time that, if we believe in a personal God, we therefore must expect personal encounters. If we

confess that we are all about relationship rather than religion - isn't that what we say? - well, then we need to welcome personal encounters with God. We illustrated this by saying that a life, a human life bereft of personal experiences is less than half a human life, yes? A Christian life bereft of God encounters, God experience, is less than half a Christian life.

Life would be very boring if we didn't have personal encounters with other people; and the Christian life becomes boring when we don't have encounters with God. I quoted an author last time who says that the need to have a personal encounter with God, this is what builds our personal history: 'We must encounter One who is bigger than we are in every possible way until He leaves a mark. It is wonderful, glorious, and scary'. That's what we're going to see tonight, Jacob is a man with whom God leaves a mark. After he has his divine encounter, he is never the same again - that's always the way. For the rest of his life, he was marked due to his personal encounter with God.

So we're looking at 'Jacob at Jabbok', as he wrestles with God. I don't have time to go into the whole story of Jacob, as you can appreciate - but Jacob, as a biblical figure, essentially represents the flesh, the sinful human nature that is fallen, the old nature of the flesh. Now the root meaning for his name actually has a sense of 'a supplanter', or literally 'one who seizes'. In Hebrew it's 'Ya'qob', and it's a word play on the word in Hebrew for 'heel', 'to twist the heel'. It actually goes right back to his birth experience, you remember he and his twin brother Esau were coming out of the womb of their mother, and it was Jacob who reached his hand out and pulled back the heel of his brother Esau in order that Jacob would be born first. So literally he was a 'heel grabber' from the beginning, but the idea in his name 'Ya'qob', it's with subtlety, and shrewdness, and stealth he would displace his brother. It's a picture of the flesh.

As we look through his biography, we find that he often covets the blessing - isn't that right? You remember he, at the behest of his mother, he dresses up hairy like his twin Esau, he dresses up like his brother, he prepares a meal just like his brother would - and it's all to get the blessing from his father. You remember, he also buys his brother's birthright with a mess of pottage, because he covets the blessing. Let me just say, it's not bad to covet the blessing, that's good; but he is motivated by the flesh, and he executes his plans to get the blessing by the flesh. He's trying to get God's blessing by fleshly means. He's grasping for significance in his life. He's longing for satisfaction, but he goes all the wrong ways to get it. He wants meaning apart from God's ways and God's plans. So here is a principle immediately, before we go on any further: God's blessings must be gained God's way. It's one thing to want God's blessing on your life - and who wouldn't - but we've got to get God's blessing God's ways.

The way we find in Jacob's life is the same in every pilgrim of God who pursues this blessing. We have to die to ourselves, we have to come to the cross where Jesus died, and realise that we die there with Him in order to experience this resurrection life, and we receive that revelation. Jacob had his revelation in chapter 28 of Genesis at Bethel. You remember what happens, he goes to sleep, and he puts his head on a stone for a pillow - and there at Bethel God meets him, and God reveals His plans for his life and indeed the nation's. He sees this ladder going from heaven right down to earth, and the angels of God ascending and descending - and he realises: 'God is in this place, and I didn't realise it!'. Isn't that interesting? God can be somewhere and you don't perceive it, you don't recognise it. We all think: 'Oh, if God came down, boy would we

know it!' - that's not what happened at Bethel. God was in this place, and he didn't realise it. He says: 'Is this not the house of God?' - that's what 'Bethel' means - 'Is this not the gate of heaven?'.

So he has this God encounter, this divine experience, and we can't go into that in too much detail either - but what I do want you to notice is: it still doesn't put his flesh to death. I don't know whether you've ever noticed that or not. If you look at chapter 28 of Genesis and look at verse 20, after this wonderful experience, chapter 28 verse 20 it says: 'Then Jacob made a vow, saying, 'If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, so that I come back to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God. And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You''. But look at the beginning of verse 20, there is a condition upon which Jacob commits to the Lord here: 'If God will be with me, and keep me in this way, and give me bread etc, and give me peace'. He's even trying to set terms with God when he's had a divine encounter. He's actually dealing with God here, just the way Jacob has done all his life. He's looking the blessing, he covets the blessing, but he's going about it in a fleshly manner. Isn't it remarkable how gracious God is? He doesn't call the whole thing off, and say: 'Look, I've had enough of this guy, I'm going to start with somebody else'.

So how does Jacob get the blessing in the end? That's where we come to our passage tonight, chapter 32. Again, I have a four part series on Jacob on my website if you want to go and look at it, and we look at these things in more detail - but the truth actually, when you look at Jacob's life, is that he had God's blessing! He actually already had God's blessing, if you look at his story from the very beginning! So often we're actually seeking what we already have, and going about it in fleshly means. God was with Jacob, but he's saying: 'God, if You will be with me, and give me this and that' - he has God's blessing, God already is with him, but it was actually his flesh that was getting in the way of him enjoying all of these blessings; and that's why the Lord has to keep interrupting the fleshly cycle of his grasping after the heel of blessing.

It's interesting, in chapter 28, when he has the Bethel experience, God has to get him unconscious - He has to get him shut up, asleep, in order to reach into his life and deal with him. Verse 11 of our chapter, if you look at it, just before he is due to encounter his brother Esau again (he is afraid he's going to kill him), Jacob prays: 'Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, lest he come and attack me and the mother with the children'. He prayed to be delivered from Esau, but his greatest need was to be delivered from Jacob, to be delivered from himself. Again the Lord interrupts him and gives him another chance, again another divine encounter, a revelation of Himself - and this is the nearest that Jacob comes to, to getting God's blessing. It's not that his flesh is completely gone after this moment, but it's the biggest breakthrough in Jacob's life.

So how did it come? Let's learn tonight, I have about six points for you this evening that you can apply to your own life from this God encounter of Jacob. The first thing Jacob did was, he got alone. You will, in this series, from week to week, see crossover between these characters and similarity between each of them and how they came into their encounter with God. Moses was alone in the desert, you remember that? Here it says, if you actually look at the verse, verse 24, it says: 'Then Jacob was left alone'. Now, sometimes, for us to encounter God, God has to strip us - anybody ever had that

experience? He strips us of people, He actually takes people out of our lives that are detrimental to us. We mightn't even realise it at that moment, blessed subtractions - yes? He also strips us of influences that we might have thought were always going to be there. He can even strip us of worldviews, theological outlooks, doctrinal persuasion, religious practices - but sometimes God has to actually interject and strip us of those things without our say so.

But there are other times that we have to take the initiative, that God actually waits and expects us to deal with the blockages to blessing in our own lives - and Jacob is one of those occasions. If you look at verses 22 and 23, you see that 'he arose that night and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven sons, and crossed over the ford of Jabbok. He took them, sent them over the brook, and sent over what he had. Then Jacob was left alone'. So he let everything that he possessed, anybody that meant anything to him, pass by him, literally, in order that he could be alone. Now, he didn't know what was going to happen, but this was the precursor to his divine encounter - he got alone, but he was instrumental in taking the initiative.

So I want to ask you tonight: what do you need to do to get alone? Yes, God might be doing stuff, yes that's great - that's wonderful, in fact, because it's a sign that God is drawing you into a special place with Himself. But is there something He expects you to do, or are you just going to wait until it happens? Well, I would suggest to you, like most things, if you just wait until it happens, it ain't going to happen, it will never happen. So, I suppose I'm exhorting you to be proactive in this, rather than passive: 'Oh, if God wants to come and encounter me, well, He knows my address'. But it's the pursuit of God, God is the rewarder of those who - what? - diligently seek Him! A. W. Tozer said: 'Most of the world's great souls have been lonely'. Jacob had to get alone with God - now, that's not to diminish the importance of community, please don't misunderstand what I'm saying here tonight. God's word is very clear: God blesses communities, He works through communities, He deals with communities, and we need to rediscover the importance of fellowship within the community of God's people. I'm not exalting individualism - and there are some people who think they are really spiritual, and they've got no friends, and they think they can go it alone. God is not into Lone Rangers, that's not what we're saying - but there is a place with God that we can only get if we go alone. I hope you're understanding me.

When you climb a mountain, if you've ever done so, there are not many people at the top of it. As you go on with God, there are times you have to let people bypass you, you have to forego certain things in order to climb that Mount of His holiness and communion. Jacob got alone, and if you want God encounters you need to get alone. Ron Boyd-MacMillan, some of you may have heard me share this story before, met Wang Mingdao, who was a father-figure in the persecuted church in China. He spent years in solitary confinement. This is what Ron Boyd-MacMillan says: 'The first time I met him, he asked me suddenly: 'Young man, how do you walk with God?'. He says, 'I listed to him a set of disciplines, such as Bible study and prayer, to which he mischievously retorted, 'Wrong answer! To walk with God, you must go at walking pace'. 'Frankly', he said, 'I had no idea what he was talking about, and I let it go as the ramblings of a slightly senile old man in his late eighties. The next time I visited, I said: 'I will never be put in jail like you, so how can your faith have any impact on mine?'. He seemed nonplussed, and then started asking me a series of questions'. Listen to this: "When you go back home, how many books do you have to read this coming month? How many letters do you have to write? How many people do you have

to see? How many articles do you have to produce? How many sermons must you preach?'. He kept up the questions, and I answered each time, and after about 15 of these questions I was beginning to feel panicked at the amount of work that was ahead of me. He seemed to sense this, and we sat in silence. Suddenly an insight burst into my consciousness with scalding ferocity: I need to build myself a cell'. Ron Boyd-MacMillan says, 'I shared this with Wang Mingdao, and he grew very excited. He explained: 'When I was put in jail I was devastated. I was 60 years old, at the peak of my powers. I was a well-known evangelist and wished to hold crusades all over China. I was an author, I wanted to write more books. I was a preacher, I wanted to study my Bible and write more sermons. But instead of serving God in all these ways, I found myself sitting alone in a dark cell. I could not use the time to write more books - they deprived me of pen and paper. I could not study my Bible and produce more sermons, they had taken it away. I had no one even to witness to as the jailer, for years, just pushed my meals through a hatch. Everything that had given me meaning as a Christian worker had been taken away from me, and I had nothing to do'. He stopped, and his eyes moistened again: 'Nothing to do, except get to know God. For 20 years that was the greatest relationship I have ever known - but the cell was the means''.

His parting advice to Ron Boyd-MacMillan was this: 'I was pushed into a cell, but you will have to push yourself into one. You have no time to know God, you need to build yourself a cell so that you can do for yourself what persecution did for me - simplify your life to know God!'. It's profound, isn't it? For some people in the world, like Wang Mingdao, God strips him of those things, like Moses was stripped of them and had to flee into the desert; but for others like Jacob, there's a decision has to be made, initiative has to be taken, you've got to be proactive and say: 'These things must go, or be laid aside for me to get alone with God. I must build myself a cell, simplify my life to get to know God!'. Now, I'm not going to lay down what that means for you, it's not for me to legislate. God the Holy Spirit can tell you very well. It's not law anyway, it's love, it's whether you want to do it or not, how much you want to encounter Him.

So the first thing is, he got alone; the second thing is, he failed to recognise that his encounter was in the wrestling. Let me repeat that: he failed to recognise that his encounter was actually in the wrestling. Let me explain that. First of all: not everybody encounters God the same, you do know that, don't you? So it's great - and I love reading testimonies of different people's encounters with God - but there is a danger that we then think ours should be identical to that. God is a God of infinite variety, and when we looked at Moses last time, it was obvious how Moses encountered God - in a burning bush. It was so obvious to him and glorious that it says: 'Moses turned aside, and said 'I will turn aside to see this great sight, the bush burns but is not consumed''. So, many people's encounters with God are obvious and glorious, but Jacob was stubborn, uncomfortable, and to an extent was oblivious to the fact that it was God he was wrestling with. He didn't realise that initially. You can have a divine encounter and not even know it.

Some people encounter the Lord in the storm, like the disciples did, but because we aren't expecting Him to approach us in that way, walking on water, He almost walks right by us - that's exactly what it says in the Gospels. He was going to walk by them, because they were so afraid. They were, in fact, so terrified that they actually thought He was a ghost. There are times that we encounter the Lord in the midst of our storms and our wrestling, and actually can think it's the devil, that we are under attack. Maybe we start spiritual warfare, and the Lord is breaking down our flesh, and we

resist Him.

What accounts for these different approaches of God to people in their encounters? Moses gets a burning bush, Jacob gets a wrestling match - well, God alone knows, but I think it may have something to do with the subject matter that God is working with. Let me explain: when Moses had his encounter at the burning bush, he was already a broken man and he was humbled. The Bible says he was the meekest man in all the earth; whereas Jacob had a lot of breaking still to come. I think that's the answer, perhaps - but isn't it wonderful that, no matter where we are on the journey, God can still encounter you. Whether you are a humble Moses, or a proud, supplanting, conniving Jacob, is anything too hard for the Lord, or is anyone too hard for the Lord? Not even Jacob. For some of us, the breaking comes before the encounter, like Moses; but for others, the breaking is the encounter. You need to hear that: for some of us, the breaking is the encounter, and we don't realise it until after the event.

That's what happened here in verse 30, it was with hindsight that Jacob realised: 'Here! I've been wrestling, and I've got broken, but it was God!'. Verse 30: 'Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: 'For I have seen the face of God, and my life is preserved''. He realised, after the event, that 'My divine encounter was in the wrestling'. What are you wrestling tonight? Now don't misunderstand me, please: discernment is necessary, because there are certain things that we ought to wrestle with in a warfare manner. Ephesians 6, 'We wrestle not with flesh and blood etc, but principalities and powers' - but we need to know, from the Holy Spirit, what we should be wrestling with that is coming from the enemy's source, and what we should be submitting to that is actually coming from the Lord and a divine encounter in which He wants to break down our flesh. Now that's huge, and I can't give you an A-B-C of a litmus test to know which is which, you've got to go to God and ask Him: 'Lord, is this something I've to fight, or is this something I've to surrender to?'. If you want to read a little bit more about that, Watchman Nee has a little book called 'Release of the Spirit', which talks about how, so often, we resist and fight the breaking process that God allows to come into our lives. When it is God that we are wrestling against, or our flesh is wrestling against in the midst of a storm, the answer is: die out. Just die, let Him have His way.

So Jacob's divine encounter came when he got alone, it also came in a way that he didn't recognise - his encounter was in the wrestling, and maybe yours is as well. His answer was: he surrendered. Look at this, verse 26 he says: 'I will not let You go unless You bless me!'. In verse 28 the Man he was wrestling with says: 'Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed'. Now, here's the question: is Jacob's wrestling with God to be commended? You know it was God he was wrestling, don't you? It was a pre-incarnate form of Jesus, probably, the Word of God here, it's God. Is this to be commended? Many a sermon has been preached on this, about wrestling with God, and it looks like he's being commended 'because you've struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed'. Yes, his persistence and his desperation to get the blessing is correct, but here you need to see this in the context of the whole story of Jacob: God's blessings didn't have to be wrestled from God, but all along Jacob didn't realise that he was wrestling himself. In fact, if you want to look at the story, you know where he meets Laban - he meets himself when he meets Laban! A mirror image! God allowed him to encounter this man who was so like him, and he gets to a place where he no longer asserts his strength but finds brokenness before the face of God.

This is the key to this passage of Scripture, in verse 28: you would be wrong to think that Jacob overcame through wrestling. Jacob did not overcome through wrestling, Jacob overcame through submission and surrender. You look at verses 25 and 26. When the Divine Being 'saw that He did not prevail against him' - now that doesn't mean that Jacob was stronger than God here, what it means is Jacob wouldn't give in! His flesh wouldn't break, he was determined to keep on supplanting, to keep on grasping, to keep on struggling for God's blessing - he wouldn't surrender! He was an Ulster Protestant! No surrender! He wouldn't give in! Sometimes that's not good.

So, look at the end of verse 25: 'He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him'. God broke him. God broke him. I want you to see, he's not big macho man now saying: 'I will not let You go until You bless me', he's down like this with his hip socket out of joint, he's broken. It is in that state that he prevailed - do you see it? The consequence was, he surrendered and God now marks him with brokenness. Look at verses 31 and 32: 'Just as he crossed over Peniel the sun rose on him, and he limped on his hip. Therefore to this day the children of Israel do not eat the muscle that shrank, which is on the hip socket, because He touched the socket of Jacob's hip in the muscle that shrank'. God marked him with brokenness because of his surrender. In fact, Hebrews 11:21 says: 'By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff'. To his very dying day he was marked by this weakness, this brokenness - but it was the mark of the divine encounter upon him.

Now listen, again, don't misunderstand me: just the way there are times you do wrestle against things, there are other times you submit. There are certain types of brokenness that we don't want about us, OK? We don't want the brokenness of sin about us, yes? We don't want the brokenness of the human condition that Jesus has come to heal. We're not talking about broken spirits or broken souls in a wrong sense, that Jesus can heal and wants to release us from, crushed and bruised spirits - it's not that brokenness. What we see here is the brokenness of the flesh, the brokenness of the old nature, in order that God might bless Jacob and us. This is a wounding that God brings to our old sinful selves, in order that He might heal us with His own life. Do you understand the distinction? His victory was through his surrender.

Are you still with me? He got alone, his encounter was in the wrestling, he surrendered, and then we see he was marked for life forever by this encounter. Intellect, success, ability, talent, etc never marks a person out truly - those are superficial things, so often, that the church gets obsessed with. Encounters with God mark a person for life. This man limped until his dying day. His God encounter distinguished him in an unmistakable way. Like Jacob, people maybe don't know why you limp. Not everybody would have known about this divine encounter at Jabbok where he wrestled with God, but they saw him limp. They didn't know why he limped, but they saw him limp. People may not know why you are different, why you're marked, but there is something that distinguishes you. It's like the early apostles in Acts 4:13: 'Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus'. The divine encounter marked this man for life and forever, because that's how we remember him - how will people remember you? Me?

The memorial of Jacob's brokenness meant that God got all the glory, that's always the

way it works. Second Corinthians 4 verse 7: 'We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us'. The idea is an old pitcher that is broken and cracked, a clay pot, and the candle, the light is in it, and the light shines through the cracks - that's why God takes broken things and uses them to confound the mighty, that He gets the glory. That's what Gideon's 300 is all about. The army is whittled down so that man could not glory in gaining the victory, but everybody would know it is of God. That's why God picks people like me, because when anything happens of any significance people look at you and know: 'Well, that couldn't be you, that has to be God!'. Not many mighty are called, not many noble; but He takes the weak, the despised to confound; the things that are not to confound the things that are.

He was marked for life and forever. See something else: he died to self, but found himself. In verses 25 and 26 he's broken, in verse 27 the Lord says: 'What is your name?', and he says, 'Jacob' - that's him facing his old self, the thing he had been wrestling with his whole life. He didn't know why he couldn't get the blessing, he already had it, but he was getting in the way. Now the Lord is calling him to face his self: 'What's your name?', 'Jacob, Supplanter, Thief, Heel Grabber'. The Lord faces this man who is struggling to be someone, to find identity, but all in the flesh; and then the Lord identifies him. He says: 'Your name', verse 28, 'shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel', that means 'A Prince with God', 'for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed'. You haven't prevailed in the flesh, but you've prevailed in the Spirit through surrender. Listen, when God identifies you, no one will miss you. Here's this fellow who is trying to gain significance, but when he dies out before God, God marks him with brokenness and his significance is unmissable.

There is this principle in Scripture, you get it with Peter, you get it with Saul, you get it with Gideon: 'You are... but you shall be...'. 'You are Simon Bar-Jonah, but you shall be called Peter'. Saul became Paul. Gideon, in fear, threshing out wheat behind the winepress, his knees knocking because of the Midianites, 'Mighty man of valour, go in this your strength!'. How ridiculous! 'You are... but you shall be...'. Jacob would be called 'Israel', 'A Prince with God'. The overcomer in the flesh now is overcome, he is conquered by the Lord. So he died to self, but then he found himself, his true self.

Can I tell you - and I'm digressing now, but there are a lot of people, Christian folk, and they are 'spiritual', pseudo-spiritual in the flesh. To put it in our terms 'they shove it on', and they have shoved it on that long they don't even realise they are doing it, it's second nature, it's in the flesh. You know, people who are just too spiritual - do you know what I'm talking about? Over the top, you need to die to self so that the Lord can give you your true self.

Then finally, he received his Peniel moment in verse 30. He got alone, he recognised eventually that his encounter was in the wrestling, he surrendered, he was marked for life and for ever, he died to self and found himself, and then he received his Peniel moment. Verse 30: 'Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: 'For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved''. By the way, in essence, that's essentially what a God encounter is: face-to-face with God. Jacob is the first recorded person that this happened with, to meet God face-to-face. As I said earlier, this probably was a pre-incarnate appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity, the Word of God - but there is an apparent anomaly here, a seeming contradiction. In Exodus 33, we find out in verse 20 that God said to Moses, when

Moses said 'Let me see Your glory', God said 'You cannot see My face, for no one can see Me and live'. Yet here we find that Jacob saw God face-to-face, and Moses was told 'You can't see Me face-to-face'. But isn't it interesting that Moses was willing - and this is the difference between Jacob and Moses - Jacob didn't find out until after the event that he had seen God face-to-face, and then he was amazed that he was still alive; but Moses actually knew what the stakes were to see God face-to-face, and he was willing to risk this. Now obviously he couldn't see Him in His fullness, because that would have killed him, and would kill any of us, however the God who declared that Moses would die if he saw Him, actually said Himself that He spoke to Moses face-to-face. Do you see this anomaly? God says 'You can't see Me and live', but then God says He spoke face-to-face with Moses.

Now, how do you work that out? You look at other people, and they expected to die when they had a theophany, when they had a divine encounter - Gideon is another one we spoke of. This is what I wonder: is this a test? Is it? God shows up in His Shekinah Glory, in some kind of strobe lighting effects, fire and smoke and all the rest,, thunder and lightning, and He says: 'You can't see Me and live'. Like most of Israel we go: 'Oh, I want to live!', and we run in the opposite direction, 'Give me a prophet! Give us some laws! That will do us!'. But people like Moses say: 'If I perish, I perish, I want to see You'. Is it a test? I think it is. What other explanation is there for the fact that Moses did see Him face-to-face, that Jacob did see Him face-to-face? Who wants the Lord enough to risk enough? But there's also another sense, you could read it another way, that all these people did die - not physically, but spiritually. When they saw the Lord face-to-face they were never the same again. You see it in other occasions of these divine encounters. How many times do we read 'So-and-so fell down as dead'?

Is this not what all of us need? So will you pursue a divine encounter by getting alone; by surrendering, stopping wrestling with God breaking your flesh; allow Him in that intimate, secret, dark place to mark you forever as you die to yourself to find yourself, and meet the Lord face-to-face. Let us pray. Jacob's some fellow, isn't he? Yet God chooses to call Himself 'The God of Jacob'. He does, on occasion, call Himself 'The God of Israel', but He calls Himself 'The God of Jacob'. You could nearly say that He takes Jacob as a surname in that respect, the God of the supplanter, the heel grabber, the twister - isn't it wonderful that we can say 'This God is our God'? If He can be Jacob's God and Jacob's Saviour, He can be yours. It says in the book of Hebrews that God is not ashamed to be called our God. It says of our Lord Jesus that He is not ashamed to call us His brothers. What is it that you need to strip away from your life, send on forward, pass by you? Is it the simple thing of spending some time with God every day, which very few Christians actually do of any significant amount - is that what it is? Or is it more than that? Is it certain company that you need to move away from? Is it a belief, or a practice, or - I don't know, may the Holy Spirit show you. What about the situation that you're in now? Do you need to have different perspective? You've been doing spiritual warfare against the Lord. You need to know, you need to know what it is that is to be opposed, what's not of God - I get very disturbed at people submitting to things that are definitely not from God. But ask yourself this: is this breaking down my flesh, is it the flesh that is kicking against this? My pride? My reputation? My comfort and ease?

Why not, even as we are here tonight in the presence of God, say: 'Lord, I surrender. I'm not going to wrestle You any longer, and I'm not going to wrestle my own flesh any longer. I surrender. Mark me, Lord, make me a memorial, so that others will see

me and glorify You. Let me see You face-to-face, let my life be an existence of divine encounter - that as I behold the glory of the Lord, I will be changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord'.

Father, we thank You for Your presence here tonight. Indeed, this night has been a divine encounter, You have drawn near to us and we thank You for that. We do not take that for granted. Lord, let us not know Your presence near us and not within us; but come and take up Your rightful place in all our lives, Lord Jesus Christ. Ascend the throne of our hearts, and like the colt of the ass that You rode into Jerusalem on, Lord Jesus, may we be broken, bowed and tamed before You. Have Your way, Lord, You are the Potter, we are the clay, mould us and make us after Your will, till we are yielded, waiting, and still. Have Your own way, Lord. We pray, Lord, that whatever You do in our lives, whatever experiences we have, whatever others see that marks us out as distinguished, that we will always be ready to return all the glory and praise to You - for what have we that we have not received, it's all from You. Lord, we pray that You will remain with us the rest of this evening, whatever happens; in our time of fellowship and refreshment, that You will bless. May we never be the same again, in Jesus' name, Amen.

Divine Encounters - Chapter 3

"Gideon At The Winepress"

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Hi everybody! Thanks for coming! I didn't know how many would be here tonight, but I'm very encouraged by seeing you all gathered - so thanks for making the effort to be here. I believe God is going to meet with us, and I certainly have a word from Him. So, we're going to Judges chapter 6 and we're going to begin reading at verse 11. Let's just pray a brief prayer before we read, OK, and just ask the Lord to speak to you now - would you do that? Just say: 'Lord, speak to me'.

Father, we just come, and we ask You now to speak into every heart, that we will truly encounter You tonight. Lord, we need a word from You, and we welcome the Holy Spirit, in Jesus' name, to come and minister to everyone here. Thank You, Father. Amen.

Verse 11 then: *"Now the Angel of the Lord came and sat under the terebinth tree which was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, while his son Gideon threshed wheat in the winepress, in order to hide it from the Midianites. And the Angel of the Lord appeared to him, and said to him, 'The Lord is with you, you mighty man of valor!'. Gideon said to Him, 'O my lord, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, 'Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt?' But now the Lord has forsaken us and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites'. Then the Lord turned to him and said, 'Go in this might of yours, and you shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Have I not sent you?'. So he said to Him, 'O my Lord, how can I save Israel? Indeed my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house'. And the Lord said to him, 'Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat the Midianites as one man'. Then he said to Him, 'If now I have found favor in Your sight, then show me a sign that it is You who talk with me. Do not depart from here, I pray, until I come to You and bring out my offering and set it before You'. And He said, 'I will wait until you come back'. So Gideon went in and prepared a young goat, and unleavened bread from an ephah of flour. The meat he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot; and he brought them out to Him under the terebinth tree and presented them. The Angel of God said to him, 'Take the meat and the unleavened bread and lay them on this rock, and pour out the broth'. And he did so. Then the Angel of the Lord put out the end of the staff that was in His hand, and touched the meat and the unleavened bread; and fire rose out of the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened bread. And the Angel of the Lord departed out of his sight. Now Gideon perceived that He was the Angel of the Lord. So Gideon said, 'Alas, O Lord God! For I have seen the Angel of the Lord face to face'. Then the Lord said to him, 'Peace be with you; do not fear, you shall not die'. So Gideon built an altar there to the Lord, and called it The-Lord-Is-Peace. To this day it is still in Ophrah of the Abiezrites. Now it came to pass the same night that the Lord said to him, 'Take your father's young bull, the second bull of seven years old, and tear down the altar of Baal that your father has, and cut down the wooden image that is beside it; and build an altar to the Lord your God on top of this rock in the proper arrangement, and take the second bull and*

offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the image which you shall cut down'. So Gideon took ten men from among his servants and did as the Lord had said to him. But because he feared his father's household and the men of the city too much to do it by day, he did it by night" - and we end our reading there.

Now, if this is your first night you're very welcome, but we've been having each month, as I have been with the folk here in Loughbrickland, a series entitled 'Divine Encounters', what can happen in a moment with God. What we're seeking to do is, look at biblical characters who had experiences with God, face-to-face, personal, intimate encounters that changed their lives forever. It's very elementary, really, in the sense that anybody that ever encounters God in this fashion, they are never the same again. What can happen in a moment of time with God is profound. So far in this series we have considered 'Moses At The Burning Bush', and last month we looked at 'Jacob At Jabbok', where he wrestled with a man and didn't realise he was wrestling with God. On both those occasions, and in every character we will look at, their lives were completely transformed, turned upside down, topsy-turvy, because they were touched by the eternal reality of the Spirit of God - and you can never be the same again when you have a Divine encounter.

So what we've been doing as we have looked at these stories - and Gideon is for our consideration tonight, Gideon having his Divine encounter at the winepress - let me just say it is utterly impossible for me to expound every little detail in each of these stories, but that is not my objective. My objective is purely to consider the principles of their encounter with God, to isolate those in order for us to learn how we can position ourselves in such a way as to experience and encounter ourselves. Do you understand? So we will be overreaching a lot of stuff that maybe would be worthy of our attention on another occasion, but tonight we want to really focus in on those things that lend themselves to us receiving a Divine encounter from God.

There are six things I want to share with you from 'Gideon At The Winepress', when he encountered the Lord. The first thing I want you to see is the prevailing conditions, the prevailing conditions of the day - and that relating to God's people, Israel, but also the land. By the land, I don't just mean the country so to speak, but the actual physical soil, the earth, and how it was being affected. Can I say that this is often the backdrop, what we're going to see here, is often the backdrop of a Divine encounter - because it is the context of the perilous desperation of God's people and the nation that causes people to cry out to God to intervene and interject, so that He may encounter them again.

This we see very graphically in the book of Judges, if you're familiar with the book of Judges you will know right from the outset that there is a cycle. We have this statement which really sums up the spiritual climate of the day: 'Every man did that which was right in his own eyes, because there was no king in Israel'. What that basically means is that because there was no ruling authority everybody did what they saw fit, so there was general rebellion in the nation. God was the King, or He was meant to be at least, but they wouldn't obey Him. So there is a complete insurrection, a usurping of the authority of God and of God's government - and because of that, you see a cycle in the book of Judges. First of all there is a declension, and people fall into sin. We're told eight times in the book of Judges that the people 'did evil in the sight of the Lord', over and over again. So there is this moral and spiritual declension, and then God causes His people to be disciplined. He disciplines them by allowing enemies to

overrun them and effectively to defeat them. Do you see the pattern? Declension, God's discipline, and defeat - and then, because God people find themselves on the back foot, find themselves under the heel of an oppressor, they cry out to God for mercy and He sends deliverance. In the book of Judges He sends deliverance by a judge.

This is very well summarised, if you turn to chapter 2 of Judges verses 16 through to 19: 'Nevertheless, the LORD raised up judges who delivered them out of the hand of those who plundered them. Yet they would not listen to their judges, but they played the harlot with other gods, and bowed down to them. They turned quickly from the way in which their fathers walked, in obeying the commandments of the LORD; they did not do so. And when the LORD raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the LORD was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed them and harassed them. And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they reverted and behaved more corruptly than their fathers, by following other gods, to serve them and bow down to them. They did not cease from their own doings nor from their stubborn way'. So you see this cycle: declension, discipline and defeat by an enemy, and then deliverance - but they fall back into this pattern again, but even worse.

There are thirteen judges, or 'saviours' we might call them, mentioned in this book. In the book of Joshua, God was with all His people to give them victory; but when we come to the book of Judges He wasn't so much with His people, but He was with the judge. He empowered individuals to help God's people come to a place of overcoming. Here is the backdrop, the prevailing conditions, in chapter 6 at the time of Gideon - it's really pathetic, it's a pitiful picture of where God's people are at. Look at verse 2 of chapter 6: 'The hand of Midian prevailed against Israel' - so their enemy at this juncture in their history are the Midianites - 'Because of the Midianites, the children of Israel', now picture this in your minds, 'made for themselves the dens, the caves, and the strongholds which are in the mountains'. So here are God's people hiding, cowering in fear from the enemy in little crevices, dungeons, caves, hideouts in the mountains.

We not only see this, but we see that the enemy was destroying their fruitfulness, if you look at verse 4: 'Then they would encamp', this is the enemy, the Midianites, 'against them', Israel, 'and destroy the produce of the earth as far as Gaza, and leave no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep nor ox nor donkey. For they would come up with their livestock and their tents, coming in as numerous as locusts; both they and their camels were without number; and they would enter the land to destroy it'. Like locusts, they would just descend on the livestock and the agriculture and the crops, and destroy it. Now we don't understand what locusts are, apart from looking them up on the Internet or something like that, we have really no perception of what locusts are like as a pestilence. It's incredible. I remember researching this once when I was studying, I think it was the book of Amos, or Joel maybe, and I learned that in Africa it's known for locusts to cover a surface more than 2000 square miles - 2000 square miles is just under half of Northern Ireland! A swarm of locusts could come and completely, as it were, Hoover up all the fruit of the land. So we're seeing how God's people were affected and infected by the prevailing conditions of the age, but what we are beginning to see is how even the very land is affected by the declension of God's people.

Now, if you were here at any of the meetings where Alistair Petrie was teaching, or you've bought any of his books, he's an expert on this whole area of how even the land cries out because of what is being committed upon the land, how the land can be defiled. We're not going to enter into that in any detail tonight, but you may care to turn with me to Hosea 4 to see this borne out - Hosea chapter 4 quickly, or you can just listen as I read it to you. Hosea the prophet, verse 1 says, listen: 'Hear the word of the LORD, you children of Israel, for the LORD brings a charge against the inhabitants of the land: 'There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land. By swearing and lying, killing and stealing and committing adultery, they break all restraint, with bloodshed upon bloodshed. Therefore the land will mourn; and everyone who dwells there will waste away with the beasts of the field and the birds of the air; even the fish of the sea will be taken away'. Do you see the principle here? Because of what man is doing on the land, the land becomes affected so that the land itself mourns, cries out for deliverance.

This can happen today, but this was the prevailing condition of Gideon's day - but this is really where we're focusing. I want you to see secondly the supernatural intervention, and this is found in chapter 6 of Judges and verse 11 - the supernatural intervention of the Angel of the Lord. Verse 11: 'Now the Angel of the Lord came and sat under the terebinth tree which was in Ophrah'. Now, I'm trying my best, whenever I read the Bible, to read it as if I've never read it before, to read it without my religious or traditional glasses on. Ryan was talking about how sometimes there is humour in Scripture - I don't think there is intended humour here, but I found this quite amusing, let's say, because it's so matter-of-fact the way it is stated here, isn't it? 'The Angel of the Lord came and sat under the terebinth tree' - this is not really the way you would expect an Angel to behave, is it? I mean, if an Angel appeared to you, you would expect it to be in flaming Shekinah glory and light, and maybe a flaming sword and a rainbow round him or something - this Angel is just sitting under a tree. We could describe it as 'naturally supernatural'.

I think there is something in this. I believe that one of the greatest hindrances to the supernatural in all of our lives is that we require it to be spectacular or sensational, when really the supernatural is often very natural, it's often more natural than we ever conceive of. Here you've got the Angel of the Lord, and He's coming just sitting under the tree. I wonder were there other people around? There was bound to be, because this was Gideon's father's tree, and so there must have been family, workers and so on, farmhands around - do you think that they noticed this Angel sitting under the tree? You might say: 'Of course they did, I mean if I saw an Angel sitting...' - but hold on, was He recognisable as an Angel? I don't think He was, He was quite ordinary, I believe, and I think it's borne out in this story because Gideon wasn't aware that He was an Angel initially. When we look at the biblical record, we discover that often angels appeared as ordinary men. Now, they weren't ordinary men, but they could appear in that fashion.

Here's a lesson that we need to learn: the extraordinary may first appear as very ordinary. Let me repeat that: the extraordinary may appear first as very ordinary. Do you remember when we were looking at Jacob, he thought he was wrestling with a man at Jabbok, didn't he, in the middle of the night? When, in fact, he was wrestling with God - but he didn't know! So there is something that seemed natural, a wrestling match, and he was a fighter, he was a twister, he was a supplanter - this was right up his street, he was a scrapper - so it was natural. But he didn't realise, he didn't

recognise until later that this was actually supernatural. This is not how we consider the supernatural, we expect to be bowled over all the time by the supernatural, we expect the supernatural to be in our faces - yes? But so often, initially, the supernatural begins in the sphere of the ordinary. Moses was the same, where do we find him? Out in the backside of the desert tending his father-in-law's sheep, and what does he see? A burning bush. Now, can I tell you: that was nothing extraordinary in the wilderness, to see a burning bush. Now, he noticed that there was something unusual about this ordinary burning bush, and that was that no matter how much it burned it didn't consume, it didn't burn up. It was that that caused him to turn aside to see this great sight, and it was only then that he had the complete revelation and the encounter with God, it was only then that God spoke to him, when Moses says: 'I will turn aside to see this great sight' - but I want you to understand: initially there was nothing extraordinary about seeing a burning bush.

I think there is a truth here, and we actually see that Moses' curiosity - didn't we make this very point that night we looked at Moses? - it was his curiosity that drew God to him in an encounter. 'What's this? It looks ordinary, I've seen this a thousand times, but there is something different about this, I want to look into this' - and when he started looking into it, God spoke. I can even show you this very principle from the Lord Jesus Himself. Isaiah 53 says of our Lord: 'He grew up before Him', before God, 'like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to Him, nothing in His appearance that we should desire Him'. If you were God, and you were going to send Your Son as a Man, how would you have made Him? Nothing in Him, physically speaking, in the outward appearance, to attract us to Him - can you tell me of anyone, anything or anyone more supernatural than the Son of God? Yet it was hidden, to a degree, initially. In a crowd, there would be nothing to make Him stand out, He certainly didn't have a halo round His head. Yet John said in John chapter 1 and verse 14: 'We beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth'. Now, how can that be? Here's how it is: you need eyes to see beyond the natural. The supernatural interventions of God often begin seemingly in a very ordinary matter-of-fact way, and it's not until your inquisitiveness, intrigue is stimulated, and you just start to pursue, that God then meets you.

Do you have spiritual inquisitiveness and curiosity? Proverbs 25 verse 2 says: 'It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, but the glory of kings is to search out a matter' - oh, that's profound. The glory of God is to conceal a matter, and our job - if we want to be like kings (and we are meant to be a kingdom of priests) - is to search out the glory that God has hidden. That's why Jesus taught in parables. I hear people say: 'Oh, Jesus taught in parables because it was the everyday language and concepts and illustrations that people understood, and therefore helped them to get His teaching a lot easier', that's not true. It may be true to a degree, why He used terms and figures and types and images and pictures that people were familiar with, of course - but actually He Himself said that He spoke in parables so that the truth and the depths of the supernatural kingdom of God would be hidden from those who would not believe. It was to, I suppose, stimulate people who were hungry and seeking after God to actually look into the matter, to tease it out, to open it up in order to find - it was only those who were hungry and thirsty who would look into them. Other people would say: 'I don't understand a word of that gibberish!', and walk off; but the people with hearts after God, they probed, pursued.

So we need to train ourselves to look for God's intervention in the darkest of times,

and when we are prepared to even see the supernatural in the natural, to see the extraordinary in the ordinary, and have eyes that are tuned to even look beyond what seems to be bog-standard everyday stuff, you will find at times you will entertain angels unawares.

There are the prevailing conditions, the supernatural intervention of this Angel, and then the unlikely candidate that the Angel comes to. Read this as if you were reading it for the first time: this Angel just wanders into a winepress and starts speaking to Gideon. He is a stranger to him, and He probably just looks like a man. So, you imagine you're doing your everyday work, whether in the yard, or in the field, or in the office, or in the school, or wherever; and a stranger just comes in and starts talking to you. Gideon addresses Him, if you look at it, you'll see he addresses Him in verse 13 as 'Lord', but in your version I would imagine it has a small 'l', not a capital 'L', but a small 'l'. It's the word 'adonai', which is also used of God as Lord, but it's the word 'adonai' with a small 'a', if you like - it just means 'sir'. So Gideon has no idea that he is talking to an Angel, let alone the Angel of the Lord, and he just calls Him 'sir', if you like. So this stranger that he has never met before just wanders into his place of work, and says to him in verse 12: 'The Lord is with you, you mighty man of valor!'.

Now, what do you think Gideon would feel like? Did he just fall under the Spirit and say 'Praise the Lord! Glory! God has appeared to me, and I am a mighty man of valour!?' No, he didn't. I imagine he was incredulous, thinking: 'Who are you? What are you doing here? What do you know about me? If you knew anything about me, you would know that is not an apt description of where I am right now'. Why would this be Gideon's reaction? We see it in verse 13, Gideon said to him: 'O my lord, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us?'. What an unlikely candidate Gideon was for this angelic appearance, and for this statement 'mighty man of valour' - first of all, because he was paralysed by fear.

I love Gideon, I love the whole story of Gideon, which we can't look at tonight, but I can identify with Gideon because - I think I've shared with you many times before - fear has been a problem right throughout my whole life. Here is Gideon hiding, he's hiding - you don't thresh wheat in a winepress, you tread out grapes in a winepress - but he's threshing the wheat there because he is afraid of the enemy taking his wheat. So he's hiding in the winepress threshing out wheat because he's scared! But he's no different than the rest of the people, because remember what they were doing in verse 2: they're hiding in little caves and crevices and peepholes around the whole of the mountain area - so he's just conforming to the status quo, we would say, the state of everybody else. He is no different than anybody else, but here's what I want you to see: you may not be different than anybody else in the church, you're no worse than the person sitting beside you in the pew perhaps, but whenever you have a God-encounter God sets you apart, God distinguishes you. We're not talking about pride or anything like that, it doesn't make you any better than anybody else, but you can no longer go with the flow, you can no longer just do what everybody else does. This is what is happening to Gideon.

He is unlikely as a candidate because he is paralysed with fear, and secondly he seemed to be racked with doubt. If you look at the tone of verse 13: 'If the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, 'Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt?' But now the Lord has forsaken us and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites'. Now, don't

misunderstand me, we should be asking questions, we really should. We should be asking: 'Why are we not seeing the miracles that our fathers did, or that the apostles did?', we should be asking those questions - but essentially Gideon was asking these from the vantage point of fear and, you know, fear is the fruit of unbelief. You do know that, don't you? Fear is the fruit of unbelief. The acronym is False Evidence Appearing Real - in other words, whenever you believe the lies of the devil, you empower the liar, and you give fear an entry point in your life. This is ungodly fear that we're talking about.

So what happened with Gideon was: he had got his eyes onto the prevailing conditions of the day, and that became his reality, everything going on around him in God's people, on the land, how the enemy was advancing. His focus was on the prevailing conditions, that was his reality - what are you focusing on? I might have told you this before: whatever you focus on will become the reality. To give you an example, there is a crowd here, I don't know how many there are - but, you know, you're a crowd, and I'm looking out and I can see you as a crowd, if you look around you can see a crowd - OK? But if I say: 'Ian, good to see you there, put your hand up Ian. There is Ian, everybody turn round and look at Ian' - I have now focused on Ian, and I have caused Ian to become alive to all of you. One moment there is just a crowd here, but when I focus in on Ian, he becomes alive, he becomes the focus. It's the same with our fears: if we focus on the conditions that are prevailing, whether it's reality to an extent, if we focus on them we will steer towards them and they will become our new reality, and they will overpower us, overwhelm us, and overcome us.

What Gideon needed was the eyes of faith, which is what Abraham had. You remember in Romans 4 it says: 'Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed, and so became the father of many nations'. This is a guy, 100 years of age, and God has told him: 'You're going to have a child' - boy, he would have to have faith, wouldn't he! His wife wasn't far behind, and her womb was dead - but against all hope, in other words, in a hopeless situation, Abraham, in hope, believed. The verse before it says: 'as it is written, 'I have made you a father of many nations'', he is our father in the sight of God 'in whom he believed, the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not'. That's God, He calls into being the things that are not. In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth, 'ex-nihilo', that means 'out of nothing', that's the Latin phrase. God didn't use stuff to create things, He called it out of nothing, created matter out of nothing by His word. Faith comes by hearing, hearing by the word; and so, when we speak the word of faith, we have got the ability, in the Spirit, to bring into being the things that are not. Rather than focusing on the conditions that are prevailing, to actually speak over our lives, over our environment the truth of God - that's what Abraham did every time he said the word 'Abraham'. When people said to him: 'What is your name?', because they knew him as 'Abram', which means 'honoured father', God changed it to 'Abraham', which means 'a father of multitudes' - and this guy can't have the one child God has promised him. Can you imagine what it was like? Again it's funny, if it wasn't so cruel, imagine this 99-year-old walking down the street and somebody saying 'What's your name?', 'Father of multitudes', 'How many children do you have?', 'Well, um...'. Do you understand? What was he doing every time he spoke that name over himself? He was declaring by faith the promise of God, wasn't he? Speaking it out against all hope, in hope believing.

It's encouraging, isn't it, the candidate God comes to - Gideon, full of fear and full of doubt. Further to your encouragement, 1 Corinthians 1 tells us: 'You see your calling,

brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence'. Many of us think that there are things that disqualify us from being any use to God, but in fact the things that we think disqualify us actually qualify us! Many of the things that we think are qualifications aren't! God is looking for a man to turn the nation to Him, and He comes to this fellow!

The prevailing conditions, the supernatural intervention, the unlikely candidate, then I want you to see fourthly: the divine perspective. You know that verse, don't you: 'His thoughts', God's thoughts, 'are not' - what? - 'our thoughts, God's ways are not our ways'. God's thoughts are declared in this book, aren't they? There is the Logos, the written word of God; the Living Word of God, Jesus; then there is the 'rhema', which is the spoken, proceeding word of God. I've got to be honest with you, this book, and what God says at times into my heart, does not make sense. Is there anybody has got the guts to agree with me? But you see, commonsense Christians almost immediately disqualify themselves for God encounters. Let me say that again: commonsense Christians immediately disqualify themselves for God encounters. You see, God sees things from His perspective, and whatever our reality is, His perspective is an alternative reality to ours, and His real is the real real. This isn't complicated.

Verse 12, the Angel of the Lord comes to Gideon and says: 'The Lord is with you, you mighty man of valour!'. Now, that was the complete opposite image to everything that Gideon was in human terms. Yet this was God's real. Do you see what I'm saying about commonsense? I think I shared with you, I know I did, when I was doing the series 'Deeper Healing' here, I think it was last year, about finding true identity, about Michelangelo's great work of art, the statue of David that you can see in Rome today. How he looked at this weatherbeaten, worn slab of marble that nobody wanted or knew what to do with, and he saw in it a 17 foot statue of David that is still the wonder of the world today. I told you as well that Charles Seymour wrote a book in 1964 about Michelangelo's David, and the subtitle was 'The Search for Identity'. That's insightful, because you and I are just big lumps of marble, big slabs of marble. Maybe people don't see beauty in us, people don't see potential, they see how worn or used we are, or apparently useless - but when God looks at us, what does He see? I want to ask you: when you look at you, what do you see? How do you see yourself? A lot of people in our society have an identity crisis, many young people in particular. They are growing up not knowing who they are, or how they're meant to be. There is so much identity confusion about!

Of course, the source of the original identity confusion comes from the first identity thief. The first identity theft was in the Garden of Eden. It says in Genesis 1 that God created man in His image, in the likeness of God created He them, man and woman. It was the enemy came in and said: 'Has God really said this, and that, and the other?', to distort man's image and reflection of God. That's always the way we have identity crises, it's caused by an alienation from God who gave us our identity in the first place. That's why society has a mass identity crisis, but that could be why you have a problem with how you see yourself tonight, the internal picture of yourself - what is it? That internal picture of yourself that dominates every aspect of your life, your thoughts, your feelings, your actions, your habits, your relationships, your success,

your career. Do you know that most Christians continue to live out of a broken picture of themselves long after their identity has been changed in Jesus? God says 'You're in Christ', God says 'You're seated in heavenly places in Christ Jesus', God says 'You have the mind of Christ', God says 'You're being changed from glory to glory into the same image as Christ as you behold His face' - and yet you're still living out of a broken image of yourself, even before you came to know Jesus.

I want to challenge you tonight to ask God how He sees you, and listen to Him. Look at verse 12, this is how God saw Gideon: 'The Lord is with you, you mighty man of valour!', verse 14, 'The Lord turned to him and said, 'Go in this might of yours, and you shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Have I not sent you?'. What might of his? Now this possibly, as we will see in a moment or two, was an impartation of might, that He is imparting strength to him that he needs - but do you see what God is doing? He's looking at Gideon, and He's effectively prophesying over him, He's pronouncing what He's going to make him into, what He sees him as. This is a 'You are... but you shall be...' moment! They are right throughout Scripture. In John chapter 1 Jesus says to Simon: 'You are Simon, son of Jonah. But I say unto you, you shall be called Cephas'; 'You are... but you shall be called...' - rock! You see it in Jacob, didn't we learn this? What does his name mean 'Yaqov', 'Twister', 'Supplanter', 'Thief', 'Heel-Grabber' - and God, in that wrestling moment at Jabbok, He says: 'You are Jacob, but you shall be called 'Israel', a Prince with God'. The overcomer became overcome by the Lord, and here Gideon is overcome by fear, fear of the enemy, but he becomes eventually an overcomer of the enemy - because his identity is found in the Lord.

Look at verse 15: 'So he said to Him', so that is Gideon said to the Angel of the Lord, which is God Himself, "O my Lord, how can I save Israel? Indeed my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house". Now, I want to ask you a question: is this humility? Is it? Or is this an inferiority complex? I have heard it preached as humility, and this is why God came to him - no, this is an inferiority complex. Listen: there's a lot of false humility around in Christian circles, and we are experts at it here in Ulster. 'Woe is me! Why should You come to me, Lord? (What kept You!)'. But we have also this perception of spirituality as wallowing in the dirt, carpet time, with our mouths in the gravel - now, I'm not saying there is not a place for humility and brokenness, but we've got to understand what true biblical humility is. Listen to Romans 12 verse 3: 'For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself, or herself, 'more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith'. Do you know what that means? You're not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but you're not to think of yourself less highly either - that's as much a sin as more highly, less highly. Listen to Galatians 6:3-5 in the NIV, just listen to it, Galatians 6:3-5: 'If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves'. We've got that: 'Who do you think you are? He thinks he's somebody!' - we get that very well here, don't we? 'Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else, for each one should carry their own load'. Oh? I'll leave that one with you, but let me say: humility is not thinking less of yourself, it's actually thinking what God thinks of you - please get that. Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it's just thinking what God says, feels, and thinks about you - that's true humility.

The divine encounter that Gideon had gave him a change of perspective that paved the

way for great exploits for God. You've heard that statement, isn't it in Daniel, 'They that know their God shall do exploits' - but I want to add to that, they that know themselves in God shall do exploits. Even before the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ, He had a Divine encounter. I know He was God's Son, but as a man humbling Himself before a Heavenly Father, He had to be anointed by the power of God - and that took place at His baptism, when the Dove came down, but do you remember what else happened there? The heavens cleaved, and the voice came: 'This is My Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased' - identity! Are you getting this? God was affirming Him as His Father, God was affirming Jesus as His Son. Now in John 13, you remember where Jesus took the towel and washed the disciples' feet? A lot of people miss this, John 13, listen: 'Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself' - that was the footing from which Jesus, the launching block from which Jesus could strip Himself down, gird Himself with a towel, and wash the disciples' feet - why? Because He knew who He was, He knew where He'd come from, and He knew where He was going; He was secure in His identity. No false humility.

Do you have divine perspective on who you really are? For some of you, it's time to spit out this mealy-mouthed false humility, this whiny, moany stuff about how God has overlooked you and bypassed you, and all this nonsense; and realise who you are in Jesus. Start cupping your ear to heaven and listen to what Heavenly Father says about you, what He thinks about you, what He feels about you.

I want you to see, fifthly, the requested sign. Now Gideon has a word from an Angel, but he's looking for a sign - and it's not just an angel, it's the Angel of the Lord. I'm not going to go into this, but this is probably a pre-incarnate appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, the second Person of the Trinity, the Angel of the Lord - it's God Himself, and He is addressed as God throughout this passage. Yet, even though he's had this, and he's had a word from God, he still struggles with fear and unbelief. Look at verse 17, he says to Him: 'If now I have found favor in Your sight, then show me a sign that it is You who talk with me'. 'If I have found favour' - if! - 'Show me something, that it is You that I'm talking with'. Isn't that interesting? What's going on in his head here? He's saying to himself: 'Is this even God? He's claiming to be God speaking to me, is this God? It doesn't look like Him! This looks like an ordinary fellow, and he doesn't know much about me, he's got this one wrong! Some prophet he is, he missed the bull's-eye tonight, 'Mighty man of valour''. Imagine if somebody gave a prophetic word like that in a meeting, you would all be saying 'Boy, he crashed and burned, he doesn't know him! He's the biggest scaredy-custard in the whole place!'. Do you understand? 'Is this even God?'

It's not always obvious when God comes to us, you know that, don't you? I've been labouring this already tonight, but you remember the disciples out in the storm, and Jesus walked on the water and they thought He was a ghost! The disciples thought Jesus was a ghost, a phantom! Do you know what Gideon says? 'Look, show me a sign that it is You who talk with me', verse 18, 'Do not depart from here, I pray, until I come to You and bring out my offering and set it before You'. This is funny, you see what Gideon is doing? He says to the Angel, the Angel of the Lord: 'Now, You stay here, alright, just You stay put, and I'm going to get something, and I'm going to test whether You are from God or not' - that's what's going on here. Now, if you were God (just humour me for a moment), if you were God, what would you do? You would say:

'Who's next in the queue? Who else is there? This boy is useless!'. But what does the Lord say? Look at the end of verse 18: 'And the Lord said, 'I will wait until you come back''. Isn't He good? He's wonderful! He condescends to our weaknesses, that's one of the things I think of when I think about Gideon - Psalm 103:14: 'He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust'. He condescends to Gideon's weakness. You look at verse 36 on, we're not going to read it of course, but Gideon repeats this asking for signs, and he asks for the fleece, and he asks for the fleece with the water on the fleece, and then he asks for no water on the fleece but the water on the ground and all the rest - and he's still asking for signs. I know what some of you are thinking, I'm reading your mind now: 'Is it right to put out a fleece?'. You know that's a question that people ask, and it's debated about: 'Is it right to put out a fleece?'. Well, I know that Gideon should have just believed God, because Gideon had the word of God, God told him what was going to happen at this point - but sometimes God, who knows us, knows we need a sign. So, there is my answer to you - it's not really an answer. He should have believed the word of God, yes; but sometimes the gracious, compassionate God of heaven, who knows us in our weaknesses, knows that we need a sign. That's good enough for me. 'Oh', somebody will say, 'Matthew 16 verse 4, Jesus said: 'A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign' - we shouldn't be looking for signs'. The only reason why Jesus said that was because He had done numerous signs, and the Pharisees were blind to it, and now they were asking for a specific sign, a spectacular one from heaven. They were testing the Lord Jesus in unbelief, but that is not what Gideon was doing here. Gideon was proving God from weak faith, there is a difference.

It's like Mark chapter 9, you remember the man who had the sick child. He came to Jesus and said: 'If You can do anything, would You heal my son?'. Jesus said 'If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes'. What was his retort to that? 'I believe, help my unbelief'. What was that? Well, it was from the vantage point of weak faith that he was wanting to prove God - that's different to testing God from the place of hard unbelief. God can give signs when you're seeking Him, and when you're hungry after Him. Gideon gets the signs in verse 21 and verse 22, look at it: 'Then the Angel of the Lord put out the end of the staff that was in His hand, and touched the meat and the unleavened bread; and fire rose out of the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened bread. And the Angel of the Lord departed out of his sight', this is funny, 'Now Gideon perceived that He was the Angel of the Lord' - round of applause for Gideon, 'Well done, Gideon! You've got it now!'.

What was Gideon's reaction? Mighty, swashbuckling faith? 'I know who it is now, it is God! Look at this, He just went up in a flame, up into heaven, this theophany I've just seen. Wow! Let me go out and take the Midianites right now as one man, I'm ready - because look what just happened, this experience I had with God'. Is that what Gideon's reaction was? Look down at verses 22 and 23, he says at the end of verse 22: 'Alas, O Lord God! For I have seen the Angel of the Lord face to face. I'm going to die!' - that's what he's saying, because they believed anybody who saw God would die. That's why the Lord says to him in verse 23: 'Peace be with you; do not fear, you shall not die'. By the way, I'd just like to say that as I was reading that at the very beginning, I felt that was a word for someone: 'Peace, be still. Peace be with you; do not fear, you shall not die'.

Then in verse 23, and this is my final point, I'm almost finished: there was an impartation of supply. That's what's in this word 'Peace be with you; do not fear, you

shall not die'. Listen: there was an impartation of supply, God gave him the very thing that he lacked. The thing that he thought disqualified him from being God's instrument to beat the enemy was his fear and lack of faith, his unbelief and his doubt; but God gave him the very thing that he didn't have. This is what is common with divine encounters, I feel, that Gideon came to know God in the very area He met his need. People say you should worship God just for who He is, not for what He gives you; and I understand that, and there is an element of truth that I agree with, but here's what I find in Scripture: that we only tend to know God, because He has created us as finite beings, in the midst of our need when He comes and supplies it, and reveals Himself to be our Saviour. Do you remember Moses at the burning bush? 'I AM', God reveals Himself to him as 'I AM' - 'I am' is an unfinished sentence, it doesn't even make sense. So what is He talking about? He's saying 'I AM whatever you need', and then Abraham discovers He is 'I AM Jireh', Jehovah-Jireh, God the Provider, He provides a ram in the thicket for the sacrifice. Gideon discovers in his fear and his doubt 'I AM Peace', Jehovah-Shalom - do you see it? What is it that you need tonight? What is it that you need in order to do what you believe God wants people to do on the earth? Maybe you have excused yourself from it because you don't have what you need - that's your qualification, if you don't have what you need, for God to come and give you what you need so that no flesh glories in His sight! That's why He chooses burned out, broken, banjaxed people to do His bidding.

But I have to tell you: people might want a God encounter, but this impartation of what Gideon lacked was given to him in order to be used. Many people want spiritual thrills, and highs, and experiences, but they want to consume them upon their own lusts in a sensual way, to get a buzz. I'd rather get a buzz from God than anything else, quite frankly, I don't think there's anything wrong with that at all - but the problem is when we don't realise that the impartation was meant to be used, and that's why the Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost in Acts chapter 1 verse 8: 'You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the world'. The Holy Spirit was given not so that they could roll around drunk in the Spirit alone, but so that they could go out and preach the Gospel to the four corners of the world.

Fear had to be conquered through continued obedience in Gideon's life, that's why God gave him a commission in verse 25: 'Now it came to pass the same night that the Lord said to him, 'Take your father's young bull, etc, etc, tear down the altar of Baal that your father has'. God is funny, isn't He? 'It came to pass the same night', like we would be saying: 'Give the fellow a day or two now to settle down after that, God has really done a deep work there of healing, and He's setting him free from fear', and God comes and says: 'Right, now go on, tonight I want you to go and tear down the idol in your father's backyard' - and his father most likely was the priest of Baal.

You know, God can deliver people from fear, I have seen it many times - but I also know this: God expects you to face your fear. That's what He asked Gideon to do that night, and, you know, Gideon was so scared that he did it in the middle of the night - that was all right. God was taking him step-by-step, and He would turn him into one of the greatest warriors that Israel ever knew; but isn't it wonderful to know that God uses imperfect people? That's you, in case you didn't know! Look at what God can do with imperfect people, look at verse 34, we're skipping a whole dose of things out, but look at verse 34: 'The Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon; then he blew the

trumpet, and the Abiezrites gathered behind him'. Do you see that phrase 'the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon'? It could be translated 'the Spirit of the LORD clothed Himself with Gideon'. People clothe themselves with armour when they go into battle, not with scaredy-custards - but God clothed Himself with Gideon. It could also be rendered, as some people have done: 'God the Spirit put Gideon on like a glove'. Wow!

Let's pray. There were the prevailing conditions among God's people and in the land, but then came the supernatural intervention to an unlikely candidate, who changed his perspective of himself to the Divine perspective, gave him the signs that he needed, and imparted the supply that he was lacking; and then God possessed that man and changed history with him. God wants to do something with you, do you know that? He wants to do something big with you, His plans are always big for His people. Don't you have this mealymouthed false humility: 'Oh, woe is me, how could God use me?' - shut up, and start believing what God says! You're listening to the devil, you're not listening to the word of God. Listen to the Spirit of God, what He's saying. Time is short, we haven't got time for all that nonsense, God has so much He wants to show you, God has so much He wants to reveal Himself to you in - His nature, He's got an adventure for you, He's got excitement, He's got a rollercoaster for you - and you're sitting in your pity corner filled with fear and doubt. Why don't you ask Him for a sign? Don't tell anybody I said that! Ask Him for a sign. Don't tell Him what it is now, and don't look for big things - He can do big things, but He often comes in the wee things, in the ordinary. Guess what will happen, here's what will happen: if you keep looking at the ordinary things, and looking for Him in the ordinary things, do you know what's going to happen one of these days? He's going to take one of those ordinary things, and show you that it's not an ordinary thing, and He'll come to you, He'll manifest Himself to you, and you'll never be the same again.

Lord, I thank You for what can happen in a moment with You. I just pray that some people will be having their moment right now. Lord, I would love a few more, many more in fact. Lord, a lot of that is down to me, I think. Lord, help us to position ourselves, give us eyes to see, let us not be conformed to this world but transformed through the renewing of our mind. Lord, I pray that You will begin to deliver people here tonight from fear, from unbelief, from false humility, from inverted pride that is false humility. Cause them to see themselves as You see them. Lord, would You impart - I pray now, Holy Spirit, for an impartation of whatever people are lacking in here tonight. Lord, You give the gift of faith, so would You give faith to people who are filled with fear here tonight? Holy Spirit, I ask You, come and clothe Yourself with us, put us on like a pair of gloves to do Your will for Your glory. Amen.

Divine Encounters - Chapter 4

"Isaiah In The Throne Room"

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by David Legge

We're turning in our Bibles to Isaiah chapter 6 for our reading tonight. If you haven't been with us previously, we're going through a series entitled 'Divine Encounters', what can happen in a moment with God - and we've been looking at various Bible characters. But if you turn to Isaiah 6, we're looking tonight at 'Isaiah In The Throne Room', but before we read we're going to pray and ask God's blessing upon our time tonight. We sense His presence already with us, but we want to really draw Him to us by faith in a more definite way. Let's pray:

Father, we come to You, we worship You, we worship You. We're about to read about how You're the Holy, Holy, Holy Lord of Hosts. We've been singing about looking into Your holiness, Lord. We don't want to be giving lip service to these kind of weighty terms. Lord, You are holy, and there is none beside You. There is no God like our God, and we just lift You up, Lord, and we worship the Lord Jesus Christ as the one Mediator between God and men. Lord Jesus, we declare tonight that You are Lord, and that You are the way, the truth, and the life, and no one can come to God the Father except via You. Lord Jesus, You have brought us to the Father, and You have made Him our Abba, and we thank You. Blessed Holy Spirit, we thank You that You have taken the things of Christ, and that You have revealed them to us, and You have brought the Father and the Son to us, Holy Spirit - and we need You tonight. We wait upon Father, Son, Holy Spirit, that our fellowship will be with You tonight. Lord, meet with us; Lord, we don't want to be talking about 'Divine Encounters', we want to have one, and we want us corporately to meet with You, and we want individually to know a touch from You. We all need it, Lord. Lord, You are the God who has delivered us, is delivering us, and will deliver us one day. We trust You for that as we wait upon You now, in Jesus' mighty name. Everybody said: Amen.

Now, verse 1 then of Isaiah 6: *"In the year that King Uzziah died", Isaiah says, "I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!'. And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke. So I said: 'Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts'. Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth with it, and said: 'Behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged'. Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?'. Then I said, 'Here am I! Send me'. And He said, 'Go, and tell this people'" - and we'll end our reading there.*

'Divine Encounters' has been our series: what can happen in a moment with God. We're talking about close encounters of the Divine kind, and we've been taking these

well-known stories of personal encounters with God. We could say an awful lot about them, we could do expository ministry - we haven't been, because we are wanting particularly to focus on this aspect of their meeting with God and the consequence of it to their lives, and indeed wider than themselves. What happens in a moment with God? When a person is surprised by a Divine encounter, when they have a brush with the Almighty - one term that is used in Scripture is to 'come face-to-face with God', I don't think that's literal, but it's metaphorical of what it is to have one of these experiences. We highlighted, and it bears repeating again, that we believe in a personal God. If we believe in a personal God, we must be, therefore, open to personal experiences with our God. If we believe in relationship rather than religion, then we need to welcome encounters with our personal God that we are in relationship with. We said as well that a life without personal experiences would be less than half a life, equally a Christian life without Divine encounters is less than half a Christian life. Life would be very boring if we didn't have personal encounters with people, yes? Equally so, the Christian life would be very boring - and it is for many people - because they are not encountering the God who they are in relationship with.

I quoted a Christian writer and speaker who said, and I repeat again: 'The need to have a personal encounter with God, this is what builds our personal history: we must encounter One who is bigger than we are in every possible way, until He leaves a mark. It is wonderful, glorious, and scary!'. We've seen that in the life of 'Moses At The Burning Bush', 'Jacob At Jabbok' as he wrestled with God, back in December we looked at Gideon who met God through the Angel of the Lord at the winepress as he was threshing out wheat. Tonight we're looking at Isaiah, as he meets the Lord in the Throne Room. I have four points, practical points to take from this chapter to bring to you, in order again, as I've said over and over again, for you to position yourself for a Divine encounter.

The first thing I want you to see is the context of Isaiah's encounter was certainly not a mountaintop - and, therefore, generally speaking, the context of God-encounters is not always the mountaintop. You don't have to be on a spiritual high to have an encounter. So if you feel right away that you're rock bottom this evening, spiritually speaking, don't think for one moment that that disqualifies you from encountering God - in fact, on the contrary, it may well qualify you, as we shall see. Do you remember when we looked at Moses' encounter with the Lord at the burning bush, where was he? He was in a wilderness, and years in the wilderness preceded this encounter with the Lord. His heart was filled with disappointment, he felt probably that he had missed God's call upon his life to deliver the Israelites from Egyptian bondage. He felt a failure, but all of that paved the way to this face-to-face engagement with God. Forty years in the desert, he was nowhere we might say, he is now 80 years old; and yet that is the time that God shows up and reveals Himself to Moses.

You might be in the wilderness tonight, as we've said before, and your wilderness years that you've gone through will not be wasted if you continue to pursue the Lord. God actually, like He did for Moses, can ignite the wilderness experience for you and reveal Himself to you as the great 'I AM'. We saw that that means 'whatever you need, God will supply that need in Himself', 'I AM whatever you need' - it's an unfinished sentence. You might look at Isaiah here and say: 'But, was Isaiah not on a high, rather than being in a valley - because he sees the Lord high and lifted up, the train of His robe filling the Temple' - and this is great, it's an incredible sight of an earthquake and angelic creatures that are out of this world, seraphim and all the rest. I mean, is this

not the highest pinnacle of spiritual, mystical experience? Well, no, it's not - at least, it's not preceded by a mountaintop, it's preceded by a low; because it says 'In the year the King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord'. In fact, not only did this begin with a low, it started in a place of grief, a place of mourning, loss, and sorrow. So, even in grief, you can have a God-encounter, even in your darkest hour, during what some have called 'the dark night of the soul' - that, in fact, can be a preparation for God to show up.

It was in the year that King Uzziah died that Isaiah saw the Lord. Another name for King Uzziah is Azariah, and we find out from the biblical biography of this King that he had a long and distinguished reign. At 16 years of age he took the throne, and he reigned for 52 years. Scripture testifies that Azariah, Uzziah, was a good king. I want you to turn with me, please, to 2 Chronicles chapter 26, because we have a lot of personal details about this King in this chapter. Second Chronicles 26 verse 5, it says Azariah, or Uzziah: 'sought God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding in the visions of God; and as long as he sought the LORD, God made him prosper'. So he did seek the Lord at a time when God was really speaking through His prophet. There is a principle there: as long as he sought the Lord, he prospered - and boy, this King did prosper. He is known as a great ruler, a great military commander, and also an innovator in his time, and a moderniser in society - even through technology of the age. If you look at verse 8 we see that: 'Also the Ammonites brought tribute to Uzziah. His fame spread as far as the entrance of Egypt, for he became exceedingly strong'. If you go down to verse 15, we read: 'And he made devices in Jerusalem, invented by skillful men, to be on the towers and the corners, to shoot arrows and large stones', now watch this statement, 'So his fame spread far and wide, for he was marvellously helped till he became strong'. He was marvellously helped until he became strong.

Now that term in Hebrew, 'marvellously helped', has a meaning that is equivalent to the New Testament idea of the enabling work of the Spirit. Do you understand? 'Marvellously helped' has the same sense as some terms in the New Testament talking about how the Spirit helps us. One example, we'll not look at them all, is Romans chapter 8, just listen, verse 26, you're familiar, I'm sure, with this verse: 'Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered'. It's the same terminology there, the Spirit helps us in our weaknesses, and Uzziah was marvellously helped - the inference is that God, by the power of His Spirit, helped this man until he was made strong, the verse says. What does that mean? Until he got too big for his boots!

It's hard to carry a full cup, isn't it? It's hard to steward success. That's what this man had, but he couldn't carry it. Look at what happened, because this is his downfall - we'll read verse 16 through to 21 of 2 Chronicles 26: 'But when he was strong his heart was lifted up, to his destruction, for he transgressed against the LORD his God by entering the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense. So Azariah the priest went in after him, and with him were eighty priests of the LORD; valiant men. And they withstood King Uzziah, and said to him, 'It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the LORD, but for the priests, the sons of Aaron, who are consecrated to burn incense. Get out of the sanctuary, for you have trespassed! You shall have no honor from the LORD God'. Then Uzziah became furious; and he had a censer in his hand to burn incense. And while he was angry with the priests, leprosy broke out on his forehead, before the priests in the house of the LORD, beside the incense altar. And Azariah the chief priest and all the priests looked at him, and there, on his forehead,

he was leprous; so they thrust him out of that place. Indeed he also hurried to get out, because the LORD had struck him. King Uzziah was a leper until the day of his death. He dwelt in an isolated house, because he was a leper; for he was cut off from the house of the LORD'.

You see, Uzziah had transgressed a law in Israel that no King should also operate as a priest. In fact, the offices of prophet, priest, and King, you know, were not meant to be combined until Messiah. Jesus is our Prophet, Priest, and King - but no one could fulfil that until He came. But here the King takes it upon himself to execute a priestly role against the law of the Lord, out of pride. We might say that he had a Messiah-complex, he was trying to fulfil a role that only Jesus would as He comes as the anointed Christ. That's often what pride is, by the way, a Messiah-complex. It appears, generally speaking, that the people of the land, and specifically even the prophet of God, had got their eyes off the Lord and put their eyes on this great King. Certainly the King had taken his eyes off the enabling Spirit of God, and put his eyes on himself and his own position - but the people were doing the same, because of the prosperity that they were enjoying from the hand of God - but then they forgot the hand that blessed them. So it was in that context that Isaiah needed to see the Lord again, something had to die in Isaiah's life before God could do something new. It was in the year that King Uzziah died that he got his eyes off the King and his eyes back on the Lord.

So, here is this principle that the context of Divine encounter is not always a mountaintop; in fact, perhaps more, it is a valley, perhaps on the contrary, it is a place where God allows us to be stripped, God allows us to go through the ring, as it were. I'm not saying He does it, but He allows that to happen whenever we need something to die in order that the new might live. That is the second principle that I'm sharing with you tonight: something old needs to die for something new to be born. You see, we can get into a very comfortable state. I wonder, I want to ask you tonight personally: is there something that needs to die within you? In fact, could God, at this very moment, be killing something in you right now in order that His new thing might live. Now, that's a strange thing to think about, it seems a strange time for God to show up and come and meet with us, engage with us personally, and even call us further and deeper with Him. Your world could be crashing down around your ears tonight, sometimes that's the way it happens: that outward experiences conspire to set you up for a God-encounter. That's exactly what happened in Isaiah's life: it was a time of grief, a time of loss, uncertainty, he was disorientated, he was in a crisis - and it was a personal crisis for him, but it was a national crisis for the land. He wasn't even spiritually match-fit, as we will see in a few moments, he was a backslider, it would seem, to a degree. Yet God appeared to him, because something new needed to happen, something old needed to die, something new needed to be born.

Here is a warning for all of us as God's people, because we, historically and even today, have a tendency that whenever God blesses a man or a woman in history, a movement is founded - and it's not very long until that movement becomes a monument, to put it another way: an empty institution to what God did in a bygone era and a movement that was born. So often God's people make the mistake of worshipping what God did, and even the blessings that accrued from a move of God and a man of God, but fail to move into (because a movement's got to be moving, is that not correct?) move into whatever God is doing now. Jesus said that God is always at work, and Jesus said 'I am always at work'.

For Him to do His new thing in Isaiah's life, the old had to die - the old had to die, listen to this carefully, the old had to die so that Isaiah could encounter God in a new way. Boy, he got one of the greatest God-encounters in the Bible, didn't he? 'I saw the Lord high and lifted up, the train of the robe filled Temple', smoke everywhere, fire everywhere, seraphim, celestial beings that can hardly be described - that's what he's seeing. I don't know whether he's in the body or out of the body, I don't know whether it was a vision or transportation, I'm not sure, but I know it was real - something out of this world. In fact, John tells us in his Gospel, John chapter 12 that the One whom Isaiah saw sitting on the throne was the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. He saw Jesus. Have you ever seen Jesus? I mean, really seen Him, physically? Isaiah did, and he's not even a New Covenant believer - it's something else, isn't it? Please grasp this: it's in a split-second, in a split-second this man is moved from this despondency of this idol - that's what this King was to him, literally and metaphorically he was his idol, he was the people's idol - in a moment he's gone, he's plunged into the depths of despair; but in a split-second, a supernatural split-second, he is transported into the very immediate presence of Jesus Christ in the Throne Room in the Holy of Holies in Heaven!

Do you see what God can do? Don't give up hope! Don't give up hope! All it takes is a moment and everything can change. So what he got, and this is the third thing I want to share with you - the context is not always the mountaintop, something old needs to die for something new to be born - but he got a new revelation, and that's what we need: a new revelation of God. He got a new revelation, specifically, of the Saviour. I'm not sure what he understood about the Saviour, but if anybody understood it in the Old Testament, it was Isaiah - if you read his prophecy further on, especially the Suffering Servant, Isaiah 52 and 53 and the rest - you know that, when he met Christ that day, God the Spirit implanted something in his heart about what redemptive history was going to be. So what we need is a new revelation of our Saviour, but something more: a revelation of our sin.

Now I have often said - I don't know whether I've said it here or not - but the two greatest things, the two greatest gifts that God can give you is showing you who He really is, and secondly showing you what you're really like and who you really are; whether it's in sin, or whether it's in Christ. The first thing we get here in this encounter is a revelation of God. You remember that Moses got it, a name was revealed to Moses that nobody ever knew before for God, and of course His nature is often revealed in His name. Here we see that there is something new, especially to Isaiah, that is being revealed here, personally of God. Look at the verses just again, I know we're familiar with them and we read them, but let's read them again - and try to picture this, read it as if you've never read it before: 'I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said' - the idea is that they are overcome, they are overcome, and there is this perpetual cry one to the other. So you see it, one seraphim saying: 'Holy, holy, holy', and the other seraphim is replying 'Holy, holy, holy' - this is just going on continually. They can't get over what they're seeing. It's not because they're some kind of robots, or God's programmed them to be like this, it's because they are getting such a continual revelation of the greatness and magnificence, the majesty, the splendour, the dignity of God that they're overwhelmed and all they can do is say 'Holy, holy, holy!', and the only response is 'Holy, holy, holy!'. What was it like?

"The whole earth is full of His glory!". And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke'. That's what we call 'Shekinah Glory', 'Shekinah' is the figures, the images, and really the manifestations that take place when God is around. 'Shekinah' is not God Himself, but it's the type of sounds, sights, smells that happen when God is about. So often the motifs of fire, smoke, light, darkness, voices - we could go on, there are others - are indicating signs that God is around. We could go through all Scripture and bear that out. Have you ever had a revelation of God like this? Well, maybe not identical to Isaiah's of course, I don't think that's out of the question - but have you ever been in a place before God where you have been overwhelmed, lost in wonder, love, and praise. A.W. Tozer, whose writings I would highly recommend, 'The Pursuit of God' is one of the greatest books I read in my youth that spurred me on to do just that, seek after the Lord. I think it's in that book, or maybe it's Leonard Ravenhill describes how A.W. Tozer would go into the study to pray to God - and he'd be, you know, suited and booted, and well-dressed, but when he entered into that study he would put on a set of overalls, and he would lie on the floor on his belly, prostrate himself in worship before the Lord, and he would just meditate upon His greatness and worship Him.

A God-encounter will mean that you get a revelation, a greater capacity to conceive - not just in your mind, I'm not talking about theological dogma here, we're talking about personal encounter with the Living God, where you are overawed by the fear of the Lord in the truest sense, because the fear of the Lord comes through love when you encounter the great God of love in such a way. Even these pure creatures, remember these seraphim are pure creatures - they've got six wings, it says with two they cover their face. I mean, they are holy themselves, and yet they cannot look on the radiant, piercing, scalding holiness of the God whom they worship - incredible, isn't it? With two they cover their face, with two they cover their feet. They are worshipping by covering their face, covering their feet, and with two they flew - so the ratio here is, isn't it, two-thirds worship, one-third service - that's interesting. If we want God-encounters we have to stop running around like the proverbial you-know-what, and we need to get before God and start to gaze. We try to - and I do it to, and discipline is not a bad thing - we try to sort of work ourselves into God's presence. There is a sense in which we may be able to enter His gates with thanksgiving, enter His courts with praise, and there are means whereby we can encounter God - but why not try beholding the Lord? We are changed from glory into glory into the same image as we behold the Lord, meditate upon Him, gaze upon Him, worship Him.

But I'm afraid there's a public health warning, because a new revelation of your Saviour will inevitably bring a new revelation of sin. If there is sin, when crutches like King Uzziah, comforts, wrong dependencies are removed, and then God reveals Himself, our secret sins are also revealed. Look at verse 5, in the presence of this awesome holiness Isaiah cries out: 'Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts'. It's interesting, isn't it: Isaiah's strength was his weakness, Isaiah's strength was his weakness. It was the same with Moses - what was his strength? Sure, he killed a man, he believed he was the deliverer of Israel from Egypt, and he killed a man - he tried to do it in the arm of flesh. So his physical, his mental, his positional strength was his weakness; and that's what caused him to go into the backside of the desert for the forty years until he had nothing, and then God called him - until he was empty and broken himself, and then God showed up and said

'You're ready', and then Moses' retort was 'I'm not ready, I'm not going!'. It's the same with Jacob, his strength was his weakness. Remember Jabbok? What did he do? He wrestled with God, and we discovered that he was actually wrestling with himself - yes? He should have submitted, he had to be broken at that point, because his strength was his weakness.

Here we see the same with Isaiah, what am I talking about? Well, Isaiah has been called the Shakespeare of the Old Testament. I'm not a scholar of Hebrew by any means, but I'm told that the standard and quality of the Hebrew in Isaiah's prophecy far exceeds other literature. So he was no mean intellect, he had a way with words, but what's the sin that he confesses? 'Unclean lips' - isn't that interesting? His strength was his weakness - and he's a prophet too, and he's confessing unclean lips! Now I don't know what it was that he was confessing specifically, I might have to apologise to Isaiah when I see him - but was it bad language? Perhaps. Was it dirty talk? I don't know. Was it lying? None of us is beyond it, even prophets. Was it slander? We've all fallen into that trap, haven't we? Censoriousness, judgementalism, criticism - was it exaggeration? Well, many a servant of God has been guilty of that. Was it flattery? Or, perhaps, could it have been how he used his prophetic gift in some way? I don't know. Were there selfish motives involved? I'm not sure. We don't know, but we do know it was something to do with his lips, it was something to do with his speech. It appears that he became infected and affected by the people around him, so the status quo, the conditioning, he dwells among a people of unclean lips - so he had basically caved in to the pressure around him, and he was compromising in some way. But he becomes undone in the presence of this new revelation of his Saviour.

Have you ever been undone in the presence of God? I think I might have, I'm not sure - I'm just being honest. The word 'undone' means 'ruined', 'lost', nearly feeling 'it's all over for me'. It's not because we don't appreciate the adoption that we have in Christ, we're not ignoring all these wonderful grace truths of the new covenant, and God as our Abba Father. What we're talking about is: every time God shows up, to any degree other than just some invisible presence that we believe in, when He manifests His presence, men and women usually fall down as if they are dead - because He is just so great, so awesome. How could you not feel undone?

Isaiah thought he was going to die, but isn't it wonderful that where sin abounds, grace does much more abound. When he confessed his sin, in a moment - praise God! - the Saviour that was seated on that throne, in a moment, when he confessed his sin, there was an angelic being took a bloody fire-infused coal from off the holy altar, and touched his lips. With blood and fire he was cleansed from his sin in a moment! You see, when we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with the other, and the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Basically what this was - without Isaiah probably realising it - was a revelation of the cross: the Saviour on the throne, the sacrifice at the altar, the application of the blood. If you want a Divine encounter, you will inevitably travel the way of a deeper experience of Calvary, a crucifying of the flesh. This coal touched his lips, the cleansing power of the blood, the fire of the Holy Spirit of God transformed this man - and what did God do? The very thing that the enemy used, God takes, He cleanses, He sanctifies, and He uses for Himself. I love that! I see it regularly with people, that the very area that the devil has a victory over is the area that they take up again, God having transformed them, and smack the devil in the mouth with it.

Isaiah could say: 'Take my lips and let them be, consecrated, Lord, to Thee'. A moment with God can transform your Achilles heel, whatever your weakness is - it could be your supposed strength that actually is your weakness - but God can take, in that moment, God can meet you and God can take your weakness and make it a true strength in Him. When you give Him your weakness, His strength can be made perfect in our weakness - isn't that what Paul said? Isn't that what happened to Gideon? He's threshing wheat in the winepress, scared of the Midianites, and God comes to him and says: 'You mighty man of valour, go in this your strength'. God makes him into one of the greatest warriors that has ever lived in the history of the Bible. Don't despair over your weakness, whatever it might be. As I said at the beginning of this message, it might even be the very thing that qualifies you for a Divine encounter.

So we learn from Isaiah in the Throne Room that the context is not always the mountaintop; something old needs to die for something new to be born; a new revelation of your Saviour and your sin will be inevitable if you encounter the Lord; and finally tonight: encounters often endue the recipient for some commission. Divine encounters often endue the recipient for some commission. All of this, the spiritual pyrotechnics, the sound, the shock and awe of this Throne Room experience, it was all preparation to hear God's call into Isaiah's heart in verse 8: 'I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?' - there's the Trinity, right there. It was preparation not only for the call, but it was positioning Isaiah for the response in verse 9, He said: 'Go, and tell this people'. Isaiah said 'Here am I! Send me', and God said 'Go, and tell this people'.

You remember we saw this same principle in Moses' Divine encounter, that it effected the deliverance of a nation? He was being sent to Pharaoh to say 'Let my people go!', to do all these great signs and wonders as a judgement against the gods of Egypt so that that spirit of Pharaoh would be broken and God's people would be redeemed through the blood of the lamb. Divine encounters are not for selfish indulgence, they are not a charismatic collector's item, they are for a purpose! Encounters equip us to be something for God. Divine encounters are for redemptive purpose. Sure, even the Pentecostal outpouring on the early church in Acts chapter 1 verse 8: 'You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the world'. The Holy Spirit was poured out not to give us warm fuzzy feelings, not to give us thrills and spills - and some of those things might come as a by-product - but ultimately it was for the salvation of the world that the Holy Spirit was poured out, so that they would go into all the world and preach the Gospel as Jesus had commissioned them. There would be signs following, but they had to go - and that's why they were up in the Upper Room, there were 120 believers waiting for the promise of the Father that they heard from Jesus, but in the moment when (look at the Shekinah again) the sound of a mighty rushing wind, tongues of fire upon their heads, the Holy Spirit comes and what does He do? He flushes them all out of the Upper Room onto the market square, and the power of God encounters the public so that everyone hears in their own language. Pentecost pushed them onto the street, and if you're not prepared to be anything or do anything for God, don't expect a life-changing encounter.

Now, again, I'm not saying that all these men that had them were all that before it, but it would certainly quicken your experience of an encounter with God if you can say: 'Lord, here am I, here am I! Send me'. You do know, don't you, that God wants to

change the world? Some people think you're kind of arrogant, or pompous, or have a secret - especially in our country - you know, people who make big statements, people are sceptical of them. When you talk about a wee meeting like this - look around you here, you know, you're not all that. It's a lovely place and all the rest, you're lovely people, but look at you - really, in the big scheme of things, what are we? Yet we believe in a great God, and I believe that if the Lord can turn the world upside down with twelve men - and they were young fellows, young fellows, not very educated some of them - if the Lord can turn the world upside down (and that was attributed to them not by anyone but secular society: 'These men turned the world upside down') because of the power of the Holy Spirit, why can He not do that with us? Do you believe that God can change the world from Loughbrickland? Hello? People down the A1 in Belfast haven't even heard of Loughbrickland, you do know that! They don't know where it is! But God can change the world in a meeting like this. 'Your head's cut! Really?'. Do not underestimate the power and effect of a Divine encounter for even one man, whether it's Moses, Jacob who became Israel - they're still around, you know, Gideon, Isaiah.

D.L. Moody had his Divine encounter, he said: 'The blessing came upon me suddenly like a flash of lightning. For months I had been hungering and thirsting for power in service, I had come to that point where I think I would have died if I had not got it. I remember I was walking the streets of New York, I had no more heart in the business I was about than if I had not been in the world at all. Well, one day, oh what a day, I cannot describe it, I seldom refer to it, it is almost too sacred and experience to name. Right there, on the streets, the power of God seem to come upon me so wonderfully that I had to ask God to stay His hand. I was filled with a sense of God's goodness, and I felt as though I could take the whole world to my heart. I took the old sermons I had preached before without any power, it was the same old truth but there was a new power. Many were impressed and converted, this happened years after I was converted myself. I would not now be placed back where I was before that blessed experience if you could give me all the world, it would be as the small dust in the balance'. Now other men had similar experiences to Moody, however other men and women equally used of God had no great manifestations like Moody but were equally filled by the Spirit. The danger is that we try to replicate somebody else's experience - that's not what it's about. But we've got to realise like Moody, who said: 'The world has yet to see what God can do with one man completely surrendered to Him' - Moody said that! What could God do with you if you had your encounter?

Let's pray. Now our meeting is almost over, but in the presence of the Lord, Who is here, will you humble yourself? Have you heard the voice of God tonight challenging some false securites, perhaps, that you've been looking to? Christians in our land are experts at looking to a doctrine, to a denomination, to a political persuasion, to a Bible version, to a religious activity. Will you choose to look away from those things and see the Lord, high and lifted up, the transcendent One who is above all of those things? 'You shall have no other gods before Me', He says - 'No idols, no obsessions, no addictions, Me', for He is worthy. As you look on His greatness, and as you see that the One sitting on that throne is the Saviour with nail-prints in His hands, maybe there are sins that you have to confess. Will you do that? Will you repent of them? Will you come to the foot of the cross? Will you allow the Lord Jesus, by His Holy Spirit, to cleanse you in whatever area you require that? Let Him take that blood-soaked, fire-infused coal from Calvary, and touch you in that very area, touch you in your mind, touch you in your mouth, touch you in your motives, touch you in your morality, touch you in

what your hands do, in where your feet take you. Let Him touch you tonight, cleanse you, and set you free. There is power in the blood of Jesus, not just to forgive and cleanse you from guilt, but there is power to set you free from the power of sin and Satan. Will you take the low place, will you confess, and will you let Him touch you - and then, will you listen? Don't listen to the enemy at that point, the enemy will tell you that you're no use, you've admitted it, you did this that and the other, and you're weak - but will you not listen to him, but rather listen to the Lord who wants, in that moment of your humility, cleansing, and fitting, He wants to commission you? He wants to give you a word, He wants to call you, He wants to commend you to do something, and He wants to empower you to do it! Some of us get so drowned in the 'Woe is me!', that we can't hear the 'Whom shall I send?'. That's dangerous, that's enemy territory - the Lord wants us to move from the 'Woe' to the 'Go', 'Go, and tell this people'. Maybe the Lord is saying to you: 'Will you stop wallowing in the woe, and would you get up and go?'. 'Woe unto me if preach not the Gospel'.

Lord, I pray for this company, and I feel that You have really met with us tonight, and I thank You for that, we don't take that for granted that all. I don't entirely know what You're doing in people personally, but I believe and trust that You are working deeply; and I just pray, Father, that You would continue. I pray that the enemy will not be permitted to snatch away the seed of the word. I ask You, Lord, that it will find good ground in our hearts, and that it will bear much fruit for Your glory - because You ordained us, chose us to bear much fruit for Your glory. Lord, thank You for being with us tonight, we thank You for what You're doing, and even pray for the CD as people are listening perhaps now to this message. Lord, would You take this message, and wherever it finds a hearing would You do a miracle in somebody's life, and would You show up - and may we all, Lord, have our encounters with You. We pray that You will continue with us the rest of the night in our fellowship, our chat, we thank You for each other. We pray for every single person here, Lord, because we're not living in a bubble, we've each got our difficulties and struggles and trials. Maybe we've come away from them tonight in the home, and we just pray for those who have those struggles, that even in their low places they've seen You in the high place, and they will realise that You're able, You're able for anything, Lord. So, Lord, continue with us, and part us with Your blessing in safety until we meet again. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.

Divine Encounters - Chapter 5

"Elijah On The Mountain"

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Well, Hi everyone! It's good to be with you again - where are we, it's February, isn't it? Losing track of time! But we are in our fifth study, believe it or not, in this series 'Divine Encounters'. I want you to turn with me in your Bible to 1 Kings chapter 19, 1 Kings chapter 19, and we're going to read - we're looking tonight at 'Elijah On The Mountain', and we're reading from verse 1.

First Kings 19, we're reading down to verse 18: *"And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, also how he had executed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, 'So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time'. And when he saw that, he arose and ran for his life, and went to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he prayed that he might die, and said, 'It is enough! Now, Lord, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!'. Then as he lay and slept under a broom tree, suddenly an angel touched him, and said to him, 'Arise and eat'. Then he looked, and there by his head was a cake baked on coals, and a jar of water. So he ate and drank, and lay down again. And the angel of the Lord came back the second time, and touched him, and said, 'Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for you'. So he arose, and ate and drank; and he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights as far as Horeb, the mountain of God. And there he went into a cave, and spent the night in that place; and behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and He said to him, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?'. So he said, 'I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life'. Then He said, 'Go out, and stand on the mountain before the Lord'. And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice. So it was, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. Suddenly a voice came to him, and said, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?'. And he said, 'I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; because the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life'. Then the Lord said to him: 'Go, return on your way to the Wilderness of Damascus; and when you arrive, anoint Hazael as king over Syria. Also you shall anoint Jehu the son of Nimshi as king over Israel. And Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel Meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place. It shall be that whoever escapes the sword of Hazael, Jehu will kill; and whoever escapes the sword of Jehu, Elisha will kill. Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him'". Amen.*

Let's pray together, and would you pray with me now please that God would speak to your heart tonight. We want that to happen, don't we? We want to encounter the Lord, so let's pray, and please pray now just for yourself - of course for all of us, but pray for yourself, that the Lord might meet you tonight and speak to you. Father, we come before You and we acknowledge, as we have read - thinking of the previous chapter, that showdown on Mount Carmel - we declare that You, Jehovah is the Lord, Jehovah is the God, and there is none beside You, Lord. We just proclaim Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Saviour, as Lord of all. Lord, we just pray that You will fill this very atmosphere with the Lordship of Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit, that everything would submit - even in our own lives, those areas that might be rebellious or stubborn, uncompromising - Lord, that You will cause those things to melt in Your presence. Oh, we just long for an encounter with You, Lord. We don't want to be talking about these things and, Lord, have a total absence of them personally. We want to really meet God tonight. Whatever our need might be, Lord, would You come down with the sweet dew; would You come down, Lord, upon our lives in Your imperceptible and yet unmissable presence. We wait for You, we wait for You, Lord. Take Your word, Lord, and use it tonight. Give us minds to understand and hearts to receive what the Spirit is saying to us tonight. Help me, please, Lord - in Jesus' name, Amen.

Well, I don't know if it's anybody's first time here tonight. You're very welcome, of course, but we've been going through a series now for a while, from September, 'Divine Encounters' - what can happen in a moment with God. We're talking about close encounters of the Divine kind, whenever people really have a moment or are surprised by the Lord, they have a brush with Divinity in such an incredible way. They come face-to-face, as it were, with God and experience Him. We've been saying these weeks that we believe in a personal God - and if that is the case, we must expect personal encounters with Him. We've been looking at well-known stories of the Bible, but from the perspective specifically of individuals' personal encounters with the Lord. There is so much we could say about these portions of Scripture, we could take whole series on each of them, but we are wanting to primarily home in on this aspect of what it was for the individuals concerned to meet God in this way - how it changed their lives - and, with the Holy Spirit's help, to see if we can derive principles whereby we ourselves can truly encounter the Lord. We looked at 'Moses At The Burning Bush', we looked at 'Jacob At Jabbok', we saw 'Gideon At The Winepress', and our last study was 'Isaiah In The Throne Room'.

Tonight we're looking at 'Elijah On The Mountain' - and really we see him in three places. The title is 'Elijah On The Mountain', but we see him in three places at least in this portion that we have read together. We see him under a broom tree, we see him in a cave, and then we see him eventually on the mountain. All of these, we might call them situational scenarios, reveal insights that might, in fact, contradict the typical stereotypes of Divine encounters. Let me explain that: what we're going to see tonight might debunk some presuppositions that we have about what meeting God is actually like.

So, I want us to go to those places right now. First of all we're going to go with Elijah under the broom tree in the wilderness. Really the way we see Elijah here is, he's burnt out and depressed, under the broom tree in the wilderness burnt out and depressed. It's not how we expect the stage to be set, perhaps, for a Divine encounter - and yet, if you've been with us in these studies, you will see that there might well be a pattern here. Moses, when he met God at the burning bush, you remember he had

been in the wilderness forty years. We talked about how it is often that Divine encounters are preceded by wilderness experiences. Then Jacob, you remember he is at Jabbok, he's in trouble, he's a twister, a supplanter, a bit of a liar, he's actually wrestling with himself - although he's wrestling with God, this angelic being, a pre-incarnate manifestation of our Lord Jesus, and yet there is a sense in which he is wrestling with his own self - he won't surrender. Yet it was at that place God met him. Gideon, you remember he's threshing out wheat in the winepress for fear of the enemy, and God comes to him in the midst of his fear and says 'You mighty man of valour!' - but his knees knocking and he's biting his nails out of fear! Yet that's where God met him. Isaiah, you remember it was 'In the year the King Uzziah died, I saw also the Lord, high and lifted up'. There was this great disappointment, in fact this great grief that Isaiah went through because this man whom they epitomised as the greatest king that had been known in modern times, contemporarily speaking, he dies - but he had to die, because they had an idolatrous tie to this man. Yet it was in that moment that God met him. We see something similar here with Elijah, and it all just teaches us that God meets us in our need. Isn't that precious? He meets us in our brokenness and our desperation. Maybe that's where you find yourself tonight? Well, you get ready, because God could meet you.

I want you to understand the contributory factors that got Elijah under this broom tree burned out and depressed. You might want to take notes on these, because I think they will be practically helpful for you. The first thing that I noted at least (this isn't exhaustive by any means), is that this mood, this disposition Elijah is now in is a demonic kickback from spiritual warfare that he was engaged in. Did you get that? A demonic kickback from the spiritual warfare that he was engaged in. I alluded to it in my prayer, 1 Kings 18, you remember he throws the gauntlet down to the prophets of Baal - if their god is a god let him answer by fire, and come and consume the sacrifice, and of course that doesn't happen; but God, the Lord, Yahweh, He answers by fire and He consumes the sacrifice. There is a great victory for the Lord on Mount Carmel. So this spiritual conflict, this collision of powers takes place, and there is no doubt about it: God is the victor, but Elijah is the hero of the moment, the man of God - and yet it's right after that, on the heels of this spiritual victory, that Elijah finds himself burnt out and depressed.

If you look at verses 1 to 3 again, Jezebel, the Queen, gets word of what he did to the prophets of Baal, slaying them, and she says: "So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time". And when he saw that, he arose and ran for his life, and went to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah'. Now let me just say, before I go further in this, if you find yourself on the forefront of the spiritual battle, you need to expect Satan to have a pop at you. Now I'm not attempting to engender fear in you, because fear of the demonic comes from the demonic - we are not given a spirit of fear, but power, love, and a sound mind. But nevertheless, we're not to be ignorant of his devices, we're not to be naive to the point of putting ourselves into exposed areas, not realising that our enemy, our adversary, as a roaring lion goes about seeking whom he may devour, whom resist, steadfast in the faith. If you are making headway for God in His kingdom, you have to expect a kickback from time to time. Ephesians 6:12, we have to adorn ourselves in the armour of God - why? Because we do not wrestle with flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers etc - heavenly forces in the spiritual dimension.

But I think, for me anyway, what is surprising, perhaps, about this moment in Elijah's

life is: he has been so courageous up to this point. I mean, if you look at chapter 18 and verse 17, he goes to face King Ahab and it says: 'Then it happened, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said to him, 'Is that you, O troubler of Israel?' - and Elijah was fit for him, 'He answered, 'I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father's house have, in that you have forsaken the commandments of the LORD and have followed the Baals. Now therefore, send and gather all Israel to me on Mount Carmel, the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table'. Boy, he's no pussycat, is he? Yet this message he receives in chapter 19, first three verses, from Queen Jezebel, this message of a mere threat from this woman has such an effect on him that he runs into the wilderness and hides. It's incredible, isn't it? Such a paradox.

But, you see - we're going to tease this out tonight - one point we should note is that sometimes we can get so involved in the battle, and we're fighting, that our armour slips and a chink can be exposed that the enemy can exploit. We have to be so careful that we're not so busy fighting, that we're not maintaining that intimacy with the Lord. It's just come to me, and I didn't prepare to say this, but if we will allow ourselves to be vulnerable to God, we will not be vulnerable to the enemy. If we allow ourselves vulnerability with the Lord, we will not be vulnerable to the enemy.

How did he get into this position? A demonic kickback from spiritual warfare. Secondly: we are more vulnerable after success. Did you know that? Right after this spiritual mountain peak experience, we need to beware of defeat following spiritual victory. I don't know where I heard this, and I've tried to authenticate it and I haven't, so don't quote me on it - but I did hear or read on one occasion that it was not uncommon for wartime fighter pilots to crash coming into land. They had done all their dogfighting, or bombing, or whatever it was; but as they came in to land, having fulfilled their mission, it was not uncommon for them to crash - why was that? Because they relaxed, they let down their guard and they became vulnerable. I remember the late - and I believe great - evangelist Sam Workman saying to me on one occasion years ago: 'David, don't let the devil steal your victory'. It's a good point, isn't it?

This valley of Elijah's came when he was more vulnerable after his success. But how else did he become exposed? Well, I want you to see that he entertained the enemy's lie - do you see this? Now I have been reading through the life of Elijah and Elisha recently in my own devotions, and I was really gripped - especially with Elijah - by this repetitive phrase in the narrative of his story 'and the word of the Lord came to Elijah, and the word of the Lord came to Elijah, and the word of the Lord came to Elijah'. But now what is happening? He's giving place to the word of the devil through Jezebel, he's listening to what she says. It's easy for all of us to do that, in fact most of the pickles and the problems that we get ourselves into primarily come from having listened to the lies of the devil. I've said it many, many times: when you believe the lie, you empower the liar. He believed this lie of the devil through Jezebel, and he empowered her in her witchcraft over him. He became paralysed.

Then we see in verse 3, further, he walked, he began to walk by sight and not by faith. Look at what he says in verse 3 after hearing this message from Jezebel: 'And when he saw that', isn't it interesting that it says not 'when he heard it', 'when he saw that, he arose and ran for his life'. He was obviously envisaging what was going to happen, he was going to get butchered by the forces of Jezebel; she was going to make sure his life was like one of the lives of the prophets of Baal. He saw it - you see, this is what

happens: we believe the lie of the enemy. This is the opposite of faith, by the way - Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness' sake; and then God gave him a vision, the stars of the sky, what his children would be like on the earth. That's the way God works, by the way, He gives you a word to your heart, and then He gives you a vision, and then He expects you to speak out the vision. Abraham believed, but he spoke it out because his name was changed from Abram to Abraham, and 'Abraham' means 'father of a multitude' - and is that not comical? This is a man who can't have any children, and you ask 'What's your name?' and he says 'Father of a multitude' - and he had to say that maybe a hundred times in a month; but he was speaking out a declaration of what God had spoken into his heart, what God had shown him in vision, and now by faith he's declaring it. But here we're seeing the opposite in Elijah - do you see? He's hearing the voice of the enemy and he's starting to see - this is what happens to us, our imagination gets filled with the lie - and he starts speaking it out. You can see all the things, in a few moments we'll look at what he says, but he starts speaking out this false belief.

I wonder what you're saying over your own life? I wonder has your focus changed from the promises of God to the threats of the enemy that have engendered fear within you? It's staggering, isn't it, when we see where Elijah was in chapter 18? By the way, for three and a half years God had protected Elijah from Ahab and Jezebel; but all of a sudden he goes to pieces, and fear replaces faith, and he runs for his life - and that can happen to any of us, if it can happen to great Elijah, it can happen to any of us.

How did he get on this broom tree burnt out and depressed? Are you with me? Demonic kickback from spiritual warfare; he was more vulnerable after his success; he entertained the enemy's lie; he began to walk by sight and not faith; and fifthly: he once ran in the Spirit, but now he is running in the flesh. Now let me compare verse 46 of chapter 18 with verse 4 of chapter 19, verse 46 of 18: 'Then the hand of the LORD came upon Elijah; and he girded up his loins and ran ahead of Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel'. That was a supernatural sprint, but then when you look at verse 4 of chapter 19, it says: 'But he' - read it for me - 'himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree'. One was running in the Spirit and the other was running in the flesh. Do you know what happens when you run in the flesh? You get burnout.

Now overwork is a real thing, you can overdo it in work - whether it's the Lord's work or any type of occupation. Over-working is bad. We all need balance within our lives, but there is a common misunderstanding that burnout comes from overdoing it. Maybe physical burnout to an extent, but spiritual burnout comes from working out of the flesh rather than working out of the Spirit. Hard work never killed anybody, really, unless they overdid it - but often overdoing it, it is working out of the flesh rather than working out of the Spirit. Burnout is when you have a chronic inner stress that reaches a level which causes a deep exhaustion, particularly in your human spirit, that results in emotional and physical dysfunction - that's what burnout is. You're tired working, you take a couple of days off, and you're OK again - that's not burnout, it's just being tired. But when you rest and it still doesn't replenish your fatigue, that's burnout - because it's something deep down in your spirit, and this is what Elijah had. Why? Because he was running in the flesh. Having once run in the Spirit, he was running in the flesh, and he was running the wrong direction! Isn't that what Paul said to the Galatians? 'How did this happen? You began in the Spirit and now you're trying to be made perfect in the flesh'. That's why he is where he is now.

Then sixthly: this all caused him to despair of his very life. I don't think it is an exaggeration to say that Elijah is suicidal here, because anybody who says 'I want to die' - it's not far off suicidal. Isn't it interesting that Moses said the same thing? And Job, Jeremiah, Jonah - they all said 'I wish I was dead'. Isn't that interesting? But at the root of Elijah's exclamation that his life would be over was pride and self-protectionism, pride and self-protectionism. Look at the word 'life', verse 2, verse 3, verse 4; verse 2 'your life', verse 3 'his life', verse 4 'my life' - it's all about his life, and him not being better than his fathers. He's despairing because Jezebel is wanting to kill him, he's not very popular in the nation, and he feels he's a failure - and he just wants to die. When really, what Elijah needed to do - and it's rich me saying it, of course, I'm only expounding Scripture, it's a different thing living this way - but what he really needed to do is what we all need to do, and that is die to self. What did Jesus say? 'Whoever loses his life', it's all about his life, 'loses his life will find it' - yes?

So what was the solution, quickly, for Elijah under the broom tree in the wilderness, burnt out and depressed? Well, the first thing we see was an angelic intervention. Verse 5: 'Then as he lay and slept under a broom tree, suddenly an angel touched him, and said to him, 'Arise and eat''. Now can I just say to you: wherever you are in life, whether you're under a broom tree, or chapter 18 you're on a mountaintop experience, always be open to God's suddenlies, always be open to God's suddenlies! 'Suddenly an angel', that can happen you know! I've had 'suddenly an angel', I've had that, angelic intervention. Let's not quickly move from the literal here, we believe that angels - according to this book - are ministering spirits sent to minister to those who shall inherit salvation, that's you if you're a child of God. You need to believe in angels, and you need your inner eyes opened to know they're about and what they're doing. They're doing an awful lot more than you realise, and can I tell you: most of the things God does for us, I believe most of the things God does for us, He uses angels to do it.

Yet this might not only be applied to literal angels, because we know that angels are messengers, aren't they? The word literally means 'messengers', and Hebrews chapter 13:2 talks about not to forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels. So sometimes, even metaphorically, people can come and they are like angels to us in how they help us, relationally. But here's the bottom line here: whether it was natural or supernatural, this fellow needed help, didn't he? He needed intervention. Do you see whenever you get an Elijah complex - what's that? 'I alone am left! Woe is me, I am no better than my fathers!', you become a lone ranger, the whole world is going to hell in a hand cart, the church is in a mess, and you're the only fellow or girl that has the answer and the truth - do you know what I mean? When you're like that, do you know what you need? You need other people. You need other people! If you're burnt out, and if you're depressed, you need intervention.

But he didn't just need intervention angelically, he needed practical intervention - and I love this. Doesn't it say the angel touched him and said 'Arise and eat', and when he looked 'there by his head was a cake baked on coals, and a jar of water. So he ate and drank, and lay down again. And the angel of the Lord came back the second time, and touched him, and said, 'Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for you''. This man needed sleep and he needed food - do you know you need sleep? Some of you, this is not a sermon you need to hear, sleep is no problem for you - maybe you're in the middle of a nice doze right now! But some people think it is spiritual not to sleep, I'm glad Jesus slept in the bottom of the boat, aren't you! Yes, He got up a great while

before day to seek God and all the rest, and I sometimes get so condemned when I hear about people getting up at three and four in the morning and all the rest - I wouldn't say I could never do it, but I find it hard enough getting up at the time that I get up in the morning! But we need sleep, we're made to need sleep and we're made to need food. I believe in fasting, OK, and I try and do it; but fasting is an exception. We should do it regularly if we can, but we're made to eat. You remember what they said about the Lord Jesus - they said 'John the Baptist is an oddball', that's basically what they said, 'He eats locusts and wild honey and he wears strange clothes'; but Jesus, they called Him a winebibber and publican, and the reason was: He ate and He drank like everybody else - not to extremes of course, but you know what I'm trying to say - He was normal. Some of us can be too over-spiritual for our own good. In the times when we're finding spiritual valleys, we sometimes go into this hyper-mode where we have to fast and we have to stay up all night, when what some of us really need is go to bed and have a good feed.

You know, I was thinking of this in relation to ministry, personal ministry with people. Some people need rehabilitation before they can really get through to God. I'm not against medicine, I mean medical intervention with people with depression and other problems, emotional problems and mental problems, and I think we have to realise that the best treatment at times that can be given to people is when there is counselling, medical intervention, and spiritual help all together - when they are in a balance, biblically speaking. Now I'm not countenancing everything that is medical, or everything that is drug related, I'm not saying that - but I am saying that there are times, there are times when people are not in a position to even receive ministry because they're too distressed and they need help, physical intervention, medical intervention. I think that was the case for Elijah. He wasn't hearing the word of the Lord any more because he'd got into such a frenzy that he needed some time out, he needed rest, resuscitation. The Lord as much as said that to him in verse 7 after eating this food: 'The journey is too great for you'. Do you feel like that tonight? 'I cannot go on'. It's amazing, verse 8: 'So he arose, and ate and drank; and he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights as far as Horeb, the mountain of God' - I would love a slice of that, wouldn't you? Forty days and forty nights on that cake, whatever it was - maybe we'll get a bit of it later on!

Forty days and forty nights, that's an interesting figure, isn't it? Forty days and forty nights, that pops up every now and again in Scripture of course. You remember Moses, how long he was in the wilderness with God's people, how long they went through, how many years? Forty years. Do you see all the parallels here? This man is in a wilderness, literally and spiritually - but we need to move on, we've been under the broom tree too long! I want you to move now to the cave, because here we find him in the cave, verse 9: 'There he went into a cave', and he's hiding in the cave and he's complaining, hiding and complaining. Now sometimes we hide from others, and even God, when we most need other people and the intervention of others - isn't that the case? 'I don't want anybody near me'. I've been here, you know, where you don't want to see or hear from anybody, or talk to anybody, and if you saw somebody coming one direction towards you, you want to go the other way - that's the way we're often like. So he hides, and he's still rehearsing the same complaint, you know, that he's been so zealous for the Lord, and he's the only one that is left, he keeps rehearsing this - and here's the reason why we see him saying this several times over and over again to God: it has become a stronghold in his mind. He has believed the lie, and now there is a stronghold in his mind.

But I want you to see that it's after the angelic and practical intervention that the word of the Lord came to Elijah again, isn't that interesting? It backs up what I said: sometimes people are not ready to receive from God, they need a bit of time, space, practical intervention. Look at what the word of the Lord is, the word of the Lord comes in the cave, verse 9, halfway through, and He says to him: 'What are you doing here, Elijah?'. The emphasis, I think, is: 'Elijah, you mighty man of God, you man who did great exploits for the Lord, what are you doing here, Elijah?'. I wonder is God saying that to you tonight? I don't know where you are, but maybe the Lord is coming to you and saying: 'What are you doing here?'.

How did he get there? Well, let's move on from the cave to the mountain. We saw him under the broom tree in the wilderness burnt out and depressed, in the cave hiding and complaining, and now on the mountain waiting and watching. Now, isn't it interesting, physically he's on a mountaintop but spiritually he's in a valley. Can I tell you: that can actually happen. I have read accounts of people like Hudson Taylor, and even Duncan Campbell, that were in the middle of blessing of God in a supernatural way, but they were in a spiritual valley and felt they were nowhere. Here's Elijah, the great man of God, physically he's on a mountaintop, but spiritually in the valley - and in the cave, verse 11, God says: 'Go out, go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord'. Now this is interesting to me, because there is usually something for us to do to position ourselves for Divine encounter. We have noticed this, we have noticed that Moses turned aside to see that great sight and then God spoke. A burning bush was nothing special in the wilderness for a Shepherd to see, but there was something different, and it was when he allowed himself to be intrigued by that and turned and waited and watched, that God then spoke. God was calling Elijah: 'Go out, and stand on the mountain, position yourself for a Divine encounter'.

Now I don't know what that means for you, how you need to position yourself for a Divine encounter - maybe it's the sleep, maybe it's the food, maybe it's fasting, maybe it's staying up all night, I don't know - God needs to speak to you, but you need to hear what God is saying to you to position yourself for a Divine encounter. What I'm really hitting at here is: so often we are too passive when it comes to Divine encounters - do you know what I mean? The opposite of active. So we're sitting around waiting, 'Oh God, if You want to give me a Divine encounter, You know my address and You can zap me - but, you know, God has never done that for me', and you're not looking for it. One: you're not looking for it; you're not expecting it, that's maybe why you don't have it - but are you positioning yourself? What does that mean? Well, you need to find that out, because it meant different things for these men and women that we're talking about these nights, and it will mean something different for you - so you need to get God's ear. You need to get to that place where God is speaking to you the way He is speaking to Elijah, and saying 'Go out'. Do you remember the prodigal son? The turnaround in his fortune happened when he came to himself in the pigpen and said: 'I will arise and go to my father, and say unto him 'I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no more worthy to be called your son'' - but the whole change in his spiritual position took place when he arose, he got up from where he was at and he went to father.

So God says: 'Go out, get out of your cave, Elijah'; and maybe the Lord is saying to you 'Get out of your cage, get out of your hiding place, stop hiding, stop being passive! If you want a Divine encounter, get up and go after it, and don't care what anybody

else thinks, where they see you going, and what place you enter into, or where you fly to, or who you listen to, or who you're reading - get out of your cave! Get out and stand on the mountain before the Lord!'. Isn't that interesting? What mountain? This is Mount what? Horeb? This is called 'the mountain of the Lord', isn't it? Do you know what mountain it is? A lot of people don't know this: Mount Horeb is Mount Sinai, it's the same mountain. You think of the stuff, the supernatural stuff that went on on this mountain previously, didn't we touch on this before? There can be places where God is in the habit of showing up. Isn't it interesting - I don't understand this, and I don't need to - but it's God that says to him 'You need to go to the mountain', and he's in a cave, isn't he? Do you remember where Moses was whenever God passed by him? He was in a cave - but whereas Moses was in the cave, Elijah had to get out of the cave. Wouldn't it be funny if it was the same cave? It would be God if it was the same cave, that would be like Him, wouldn't it?

He says 'Go out', 'And behold, the Lord passed by', the Lord passed by - now, how did He pass by? 'And a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice'. Now this has often intrigued me, this passage of Scripture, this verse - the reason being: there are many other places within Scripture where wind, earthquake, and fire display the presence of God; and I think it's doing exactly the same here as well. Because what we've got here is the Shekinah Glory of God - and I think I've taught you before, I don't know exactly, but I probably have mentioned that the Shekinah of God are figurative images, motifs, that indicate when God is around, when the presence of God shows up. So it could be cloud, it could be fire, it could be thunder, earthquakes here, it could be a voice - various things, light, even darkness, that appear whenever God is about - but they are not God, they are not God Himself, they are just things that happen when God is around. This is what is going on here: these are signs of the Divine presence, they are actually preceding the Lord just like a messenger, but they are not the Lord Himself. Matthew Henry actually says: 'These are allusions to the angelic procession that precedes the Lord', so it's as if the angels are going by, wind and fire and earthquake, ahead of the Lord Himself - but these things were not God Himself.

I want you to note here tonight that these phenomena, they must have been spectacular - can you see him standing outside this cave and the wind, and the fire, and the earthquake? But these phenomena were not what Elijah needed, now ponder that. Sure, he saw a miracle in chapter 18, did he not? Fire coming from heaven, but it wasn't doing any good here, was it, in chapter 19? I believe, you know I believe in the miraculous, and you know I believe we need the miraculous, and you know I believe we need touches of the supernatural - but that was not going to answer Elijah's problem at this moment. Often we fall into the same trap, when we seek a Divine encounter, we are seeking the phenomena, we're seeking the gifts, and we're not seeking God for Himself. Now it's not wrong to seek those things in their rightful place, we're encouraged to, but not at the expense of seeking Him. Frances Brook put it:

'My goal is God Himself, not joy, nor peace,
Nor even blessing, but Himself, my God'

What Elijah needed was to hear the voice of God again. Do you know something? This

man's mind, in the state that it was in, needed the whispers of God. That's what some people need. When they are in a state of distress, when they're depressed, dejected, even suicidal, they don't need somebody shouting and ranting and raving in a rain dance fashion around them, they need the whispers of God. Some people with disturbed minds, they need to hear the still small voice.

This still small voice that the Lord was in can be translated 'the voice of a gentle whisper'. Do you know one of the greatest hindrances to the supernatural is the desire for the sensational? Now God does do sensational things and spectacular things, but sometimes our desire for that gets in the way of the supernatural which is often very supernaturally natural. It's more natural at times than we realise. We need to cultivate a quietness. I mean, let's face it, you can't hear a still small voice if there's a lot of hullabaloo and racket around - and that applies to your mind, it applies to your heart, it applies to your environment. We need to get quiet again. I've talked, I think I did, about solitude, I think maybe when Moses was in the wilderness we touched on that. It's not easy in today's modern age when there are dings, buzzes, and all sorts of things going off every couple of seconds, social media, and SMS, emails - it's hard to get away, there is so much clamouring for our attention and trying to drown out the voice of God. That's why we're not often hearing the voice of God, because we're hearing so many other things.

A few weeks ago, Barbara, my wife, was writing a 'Get Well' card to my sister-in-law who had gone through an operation. Very often Barbara will come into me when I'm in the study, and in a train of thought or something, and she'll say: 'Give me a verse, give me a passage for to put on this card' - and I just fling out half times any old verse, not any old verse, something relevant, but I don't think and pray about it for much time. Usually it's Psalm 121 - so if you've got a card from us with Psalm 121, now you know the process of how it works, or Psalm 46: 'God is our refuge and strength', you know. That particular day it was Psalm 46, I said 'Put Psalm 46, that will be a good one', and so later on in the day I had a wee pitstop time with God, a wee prayer time. I sat down on my easy chair in my study and thought 'What will I meditate on here for a moment or two in prayer?'. It came into my mind, Psalm 46 verses 10 and 11, 'Be still and know that I am God'. I thought 'Sure, I know that', you're thinking 'I'm so familiar with that verse, you know, that's not going to do much for me now' - we're always looking something new, aren't we? But I really felt strongly: 'No', that the Lord was telling me to lift this. I had (don't fall off your seat, now) a pile of Bibles at the side of my easy chair, and at the top of them was one I like a lot 'The Good News Bible', OK, don't tell anybody! I like the pictures in it! I lifted the Good News Bible and I looked up Psalm 46 verses 10 and 11. It astounded me, here's what it said: 'Stop fighting, and know that I am God'. Did you know that 'be still', that's what it means? We think it means sitting in the lotus position or something, what does 'be still' mean? In the context of that Psalm, God, the God of Jacob is the God who makes wars to cease - 'Stop fighting'. That's what Jacob needed to hear, 'Stop wrestling, Jacob, be still'. I was rebuked, I thought I knew that verse 'Be still and know that I'm God'. Then I had another underneath that one, there's another translation I have called 'The Passion Translation', a very good translation - and I thought 'I wonder what it says'. Here's how it rendered 'Be still and know that I'm God', listen: 'Surrender your anxiety, be silent, and stop your striving, and you will see that I am God'. Surrender your anxiety, be silent, and stop your striving, and you will see that I am God - that's why some of us can't hear the still small voice, there is too much anxiety going on.

There is a Greek translation of the Old Testament, did you know that, called the Septuagint? If you look at the footnotes in your Bible, it will be shown as the LXX, it's the Greek version of the Hebrew Old Testament. Do you know how it translates 'be still'? 'Relax and know that I am God'. Did you know you have to relax to hear the still small voice? I don't tell too many people this - I suppose it's a bad job doing it now - but God often speaks to me through dreams. Some of my dreams are a lot of rubbish, but sometimes God speaks to me through my dreams - that might be because I'm too busy in my head when I'm awake, I don't know. But do you know when God most often speaks to me when I'm asleep and when I'm awake? On my holidays. I'd love to ask you: is that the same for any of you, but maybe you backslide when you go on holidays, I don't know! Do you understand what I'm saying? Do you see when I naturally relax, still myself - not for God, I'm not doing it for God, I'm doing it for myself - but when I naturally become still, all of a sudden I can hear. I remember getting a full sermon one morning after a bit of a lie in in the caravan, I woke up, read the book of Esther, and God downloaded a sermon that you can get (I think I might have preached it here) on 'God's Door In Disaster', but it was all downloaded from God in that moment. I should lie in all the time, shouldn't I?

But what was the message - I'm almost finished - what was the message, what was the message of the still small voice? Well, we maybe don't know it all. He wrapped his mantle around him, having heard the voice of God, and God says again: 'What are you doing here, Elijah? What's going on with you?'. Then he goes on a spiel again: 'I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life'. 'Then the Lord said to him: 'Go, return on your way to the Wilderness' - and basically, here's what God tells him, are you ready? 'Go and anoint two kings, Elijah' - and by anointing the two kings, what he was doing was, he was finishing the wicked dynasty of Ahab who was the troubler of all Israel. So God was answering Elijah's prayers. Not only had he to anoint two kings, he had to anoint Elisha as his successor in the prophetic ministry. So what God was saying to him was 'Elijah, you're not the only one that is left, and you will have a legacy in Elisha and his ministry.

You remember Elisha - this is all a digression - but you remember Elisha desired to have a double portion of what came upon Elijah. Do you know that Elisha had exactly double the number of miracles that Elijah had? Did you know that? Well, that's not quite true, to one extent, he had one less until his funeral, and then the dead man was thrown in on the coffin and he came alive - and it was double, exactly, of the miracles of Elijah. Then God just crowns it all by saying: 'Anyway, Elijah, there are 7000 who have not yet bowed the knee to Baal or kissed him'. You know what seven is in the Bible, it's the perfect number, this is speaking of a perfect number of people interceding and calling upon God - and you're going to see your prayers answered, Elijah! Do not despair!

If we could be a bit harsher about it, the Lord is really saying: 'Elijah, get over yourself, there's more than you, there's more than you'. Sometimes we all have - myself included - we all have a wee 'Elijah fit' where we think 'I'm the only one doing this', or 'I'm the only one standing for this', or 'I'm the only one, I'm the only one' - and it's a lot of rubbish. Do you know God can do it without you? He can do it without me. If I died and went to heaven tonight, He can do it without me. In fact, I don't even

think I would be missed because God will do something else. What did Mordecai say to Esther? 'If you don't do it, deliverance will come from another place'.

So I don't know if you're under the broom tree or not, or you're in the cave, or you're on the mountain but in the valley - but do you know what you need? You need to be still, and you need to wait and watch for the word of the Lord. Let's pray. One of the greatest encounters could be the still small voice of God. I know we want the pyrotechnics, and the lights in the sky, and we want the earthquakes and all that stuff - and God can do that, and I'm up for that alright, shake, rattle and roll, bring it on - but not at the expense of the still small voice. Because I'm going to tell you this: it's the still small voice that will be your meat day and night, that will feed your soul. When the big miracles aren't happening, the still small voice will go on speaking and feeding you. The still small voice will be what will prevent you from burning out. Like Jesus says: 'I have meat that you know not of, I have food that you don't know about', and it was the voice of God, 'I do what I see the Father do'.

I don't know where you're at. Maybe you're depressed and dejected, or you're hiding, or you're disappointed, or you feel 'I'm the only one doing this'. Would you allow God to come to you tonight? Now, I'm not going to go back on what I said, some of you might need a bit of R&R spiritually and even physically. Some of you might need a bit of time out in order to get into a place where you can actually receive and hear the voice of God. Over Christmas I took a few weeks off, and I'll be honest with you: at the beginning of those holidays, because I had been so busy before Christmas (and, by the way, I'm getting close to it now again), I could hardly hear the voice of God, I could hardly feel God. But after a couple of weeks - and I wasn't praying and fasting over Christmas, I could have done with a bit of fasting over Christmas! - but by the end of Christmas, I was starting to hear God again. You know, we are obsessed in Christian circles with meetings, and with serving, and with running, and with doing - and as someone well said: 'We are human beings, not human doings'. We need to be, God is the great 'I AM', and we need to be in His presence if we're going to do anything worthwhile.

Maybe you just need to choose tonight: 'I need to put some buffers into my life. I need to practice Sabbath rest on a weekly basis, and on a daily basis have little junctures during the day when I pause'. Maybe you need sabbatical, where you take a month off, some of you maybe need to take a year out, a career break. I don't know, but maybe some of you are looking for the spectacular, you're looking for God in the earthquake, fire, and wind; but you've ignored the still small voice. What you need to do now is be still, take your journal - if you haven't got one, get one - and in the stillness allow God to start to speak to you, and write down what He is saying. He will speak - do you see when I start doing that, He says so much I can hardly get it all down. But do you know what my problem is? Taking the time to stop and to listen.

Father, we ask for Your stillness to come, and we believe You have. Lord, we just pray now - I pray for some who are ready, that You might even speak in that still small voice now.

'Drop Thy still dews of quietness,
Till all our strivings cease;
Take from our souls the strain and stress,
And let our ordered lives confess

The beauty of Thy peace'.

Lord, help people in this room tonight to surrender their anxiety, to be silent, to stop striving, to stop fighting, to relax and rest upon You - the rest of faith. There is a Sabbath appointed unto the people of God, there is a rest appointed to the people of God. Oh Lord, let us come to You with all our heavy laden burdens and find rest. Lord, may there be people here tonight and in subsequent days who have their Divine encounter. If there are people with depression, if there are people suicidal, if there are people struggling about their role and calling and identity, if there is anybody here with an Elijah complex - Lord, would You come and begin to meet them at the point of their need, and show them that it's not about them, it's about You. The work goes on, and the kingdom of God goes on irrespective of who the prophet is. Lord, I pray that You will just bless the rest of our fellowship together tonight, and whatever else You want to do. We love You, Lord, we love You. There is so much pride at times, Lord, we think we are something - and yet, Lord, You love us, we are valuable to You, we are unique and You shed the blood of Jesus for us, we mean so much to You. We thank You that You're so gracious to us and long-suffering, and we will get there, Lord, we know we will - help us to get there all the quicker, Lord, by Your grace. Bless our time, we thank You for these refreshments. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Divine Encounters - Chapter 6

"The Three On The Mount"

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Luke chapter 9, and we're going to begin reading at verse 28. Let's pray before we read. Lord, our songs, we trust, have not just been empty words. We really do want to meet with You tonight, we do want Your Spirit to breathe upon us. Lord, we would desire to know that we are under an open heaven and there is nothing between us and You. We want to be in that Bethel place, where the angels of God ascend and descend upon the Son of Man. We want this place tonight to be a gateway to heaven, a portal through which You can visit us and we can visit You. Lord, we really ask for Divine encounters tonight, we ask that we would see Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith. So, Holy Spirit, would You come, and would You reveal the Lord Jesus to us. We need Your help:

'Emptied that Thou shouldest fill me,
A clean vessel in Thy hand;
With no power but as Thou givest
Graciously with each command.

Channels only, blessed Master,
But with all Thy wondrous power,
Flowing through us, Thou canst use us
Every day and every hour'.

This is what we ask for, this is what I ask for now, Lord. In Jesus' Name, Amen

Verse 28, then, of chapter 9 of Luke: *"Now it came to pass, about eight days after these sayings, that He", that's Jesus, "took Peter, John, and James and went up on the mountain to pray. As He prayed, the appearance of His face was altered, and His robe became white and glistening. And behold, two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. But Peter and those with him were heavy with sleep; and when they were fully awake, they saw His glory and the two men who stood with Him. Then it happened, as they were parting from Him, that Peter said to Jesus, 'Master, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah' - not knowing what he said. While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were fearful as they entered the cloud. And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, 'This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!' When the voice had ceased, Jesus was found alone. But they kept quiet, and told no one in those days any of the things they had seen".*

Our series these Friday night at Oasis has been 'Divine Encounters', what can happen in a moment with God. What we've been talking about are incidents within Scripture of close encounters of the Divine kind. Most of the incidents that we have looked at are well-known Bible stories, but we haven't been looking at them just expositively from a Bible study perspective alone, but particularly from the aspect of what these were as

personal encounters with God Almighty - these men and women who had a moment with God, who were surprised by God in some way. We might say they had a brush with God, or even a face-to-face encounter with Him. So they are experiencing God in some kind of dramatic way. We have emphasised this, and it bears repeating every night: that we have a personal God, and therefore, because of that, we must expect personal encounters with Him. Christianity - it's a cliché now - is not a religion, it's a relationship. If we are in relationship with God, we've got to expect intimate encounters with Him.

So we looked at 'Moses At The Burning Bush', 'Jacob At Jabbok' as he wrestled with God, 'Gideon At The Winepress', 'Isaiah In The Throne Room', and the last time, I think it was in February, 'Elijah On The Mountain'. Tonight we are looking at 'The Three On The Mount', the three being Peter, John, and James who the Lord Jesus brought to the Mount of Transfiguration, before whom He was transfigured. There are five principles that I want to share with you tonight that, again, will serve to position us in order to have Divine encounters.

The first one I want you to see from the passage this evening is: everyone can have encounters, but not everyone does. Everyone can have them, but not everyone does have them. We see that it was Peter, John, and James that the Lord Jesus chose out of the twelve - the rest were left behind - and He took these three up the Mount with Him. We could call these three disciples in particular 'the inner circle of intimacy'. I'll not go into all this, but you know that there were the seventy, or the seventy-two, then there were the twelve, but even within the twelve there was this inner circle who seems to be brought into more confidence with our Lord Jesus - and then John himself, the beloved disciple, seems to have had prime place, almost, in the intimacy. We see that in his Gospel and his epistles, and in the book of Revelation.

We see Peter, John, and James, they were the three whom Jesus took into Jairus' house, and into the bedroom where the little 12-year-old girl was lying dead - and it was those three who witnessed that great sign and wonder of that little girl's resurrection. It was also Peter, John, and James that Jesus permitted to come with Him into that sacred moment in the Garden of Gethsemane, when He sweat, as it were, great drops of blood and He was near to death as He contemplated Calvary. It was John, of course, who was the one who remained at the cross when everyone else fled.

So we're being taught something here. I mean, if you decide to go for a hike tomorrow morning up Slieve Donard, or any other mountain for that matter, you'll find that at the top there will not be that many people there. Generally speaking, at every mountaintop there are few gathered. It was the case here at the Mount of Transfiguration: just Peter, John, and James. I have to say to you that there is an element of sovereignty here. It says, if you look at the verse, 'He took', verse 28, 'He took Peter, James, and John'. There are certain aspects of Divine encounters that are sovereign. What I mean by that is: God can come and touch a person uniquely, in a way that no other person may be touched, or few are - we've got to recognise that. Yet there is also, and this is often the tension within Scripture, the aspect of responsibility. What I mean by responsibility is: desire and pursuit of God and Divine encounters.

Why did Jesus take Peter, John, and James? Well, I happen to believe that, though

there is a sovereign aspect to Divine encounters, there is also a principle that is explicit within the word of God. James 4 and verse 8: 'Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you'. There is the principle that God is usually found by those who seek Him. It's right throughout the revelation of the Bible. Jeremiah 29:13-14: 'You will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. I will be found by you, says the LORD'. Now, there is a scripture in Isaiah 65 that says: 'I will be found by those who did not seek Me', and it's repeated again in Romans 10:20 - but that is in the context about the Gentiles coming to know the Lord outside the Commonwealth of Israel, it's not primarily talking about those who are just disinterested in the Lord and receiving Divine encounters, although that can happen in God's sovereignty. But the general rule is that it is those who seek and search for the Lord, who pursue Him and desire Him, that will discover Him.

That, for me, is profound; and it is also very convicting - because, on a practical level, what that means for me is that you can have as much as God as you want. Just let that sink in. Sometimes we might see these biblical Divine encounters, we may read about others throughout church history that the great heroes of the faith have had, and we might get a little bit jealous. There may be somebody in your fellowship, or in your circle of knowledge, and they have had certain experiences, supernatural et cetera - and you really long that you should know God like they know God, and have the experience of Him in the same way. There is an aspect of sovereignty, so we have to be very careful; and yet be aware that there is also this responsibility of pursuit and desire, which means you can have as much of God as you want. The issue, essentially, is desire: how much do you want Him? I'm so convicted by that.

It was C.S. Lewis who said: 'It would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us. Like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea, we are far too easily pleased'. Maybe you think that your problem is a problem of lust, or a problem of greed, or a problem of desire for wrong things. Lewis is saying that the problem is: our desires are too weak; not too strong, too weak. We are far too easily pleased with lesser things, when our greatest hunger should be after God.

That's what part of the parable of the seed, the sower, and the soils was about, isn't that right? In Mark 4, Jesus said: 'Now these are the ones sown among thorns; they are the ones who hear the word, and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful' - the desire for other things, when our first love is taken away. I think it was a meeting I was at yesterday, and some of you were at it - not yesterday, Wednesday - and someone made the point, I think it was there, that one of the things that all the revivalists down through the ages have had in common is that they were madly in love with Jesus. They had differences about baptism, they had differences in their view of predestination, they had differences in their concept of the Lord's return, they had differences to do with practice in church life and how we do things - but they had this in common: they were absolutely consumed with a passion for Jesus. It was Vance Havner who said: 'Revival is falling in love with Jesus all over again'.

Tonight, you may have noticed, is the first 'Divine Encounter' that we have embarked upon in the New Testament, and it's specifically related to a revelation of our Lord

Jesus Christ. So I'm asking you tonight how much you want God, how much of God do you want? How much do you want Him? How much of Him? A.W. Tozer wrote that marvellous book 'The Pursuit of God', and on one occasion he says this: 'An infinite God can give all of Himself to each of His children' - isn't that incredible? 'An infinite God can give all of Himself to each of His children. He does not distribute Himself that each may have a part, but to each one He gives all of Himself as fully as if there were no others'. It's incredible! In another place he says: 'Our pursuit of God is successful just because He is forever seeking to manifest Himself to us'.

So the question is not of God's desire to encounter us, the real question is of our desire to encounter Him - what is it? How strong is it? Everyone can have encounters, but not everyone does. There is a sovereign element, but essentially, for me, there is this principle of the responsibility to pursue and desire God.

So, how do you position yourself for that? What can we learn from the Transfiguration? Well - after realising that everyone can have this encounter, but not all do, and we start pursuing it - we need to see that encounters are launched from the platform of prayer. Do you see this? It says 'He took Peter, John, and James and went up on the mountain to pray. As He prayed' - and then He's transfigured. So encounters are launched from the platform of prayer. Just fast forward a little bit into the Garden of Gethsemane, and these three are there again - He exhorts them to do what? 'Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation, because the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak'. He then comes again, finds them asleep, He says: 'Could you not even watch one hour?'. Here is an example in the Transfiguration that, as He prayed, He was totally transformed.

Is it any wonder in chapter 11, if you were to skip a couple of chapters, and verse 1 it says: 'Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, 'Lord, teach us to pray' - because they had seen what happened when Jesus prayed. He was transfigured! Do you know what 'transfigured' means? The dictionary definition: 'a complete change of form or appearance into a more beautiful and spiritual state' - wow! A change of appearance into a more beautiful and spiritual state. Now, this was unique to Christ, we know that because there is a sense here in His Transfiguration that this was His Divine glory bursting forth. Peter in His epistle says: 'We were eyewitnesses of His majesty'. However, we may experience something like Peter, John, and James did as they witnessed this great sight.

What am I talking about? Turn with me to 2 Corinthians chapter 4 please, verse 6: 'For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God' - where? - 'In the face of Jesus Christ'. We can have the knowledge of God's glory in the face of Jesus, just the way Peter, John, and James saw that glory on the Transfiguration Mount - but we can also experience a kind of transfiguration ourselves. Go back with me one chapter to 2 Corinthians 3:18: 'But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord'. Wow, isn't that incredible! We can be transfigured as we behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Now, my point here was that encounters are launched from the platform of prayer, but I'm not just talking about any prayer. There are people who can pray for a living and never ever encounter the Lord - that's incredible to think, but that's a reality. There

are people who have given their whole lives to a life of monasticism or some kind of devotion in some religious order - and I'm not despising all of that - I'm just saying, some people have done that, some people read their Bible and pray every day because they want to grow, but they never have these incredible supernatural engagements with God. You see there are different kinds of prayer, but surely the purest prayer is beholding the face of Christ? Do you know what I'm talking about? Encounters are launched from the platform of prayer, but specifically, this type of beholding the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, this being transformed from glory to glory in the same image as we behold Jesus.

Moses, it says, talked face-to-face with God. It's hinted at here in 2 Corinthians that, because of the glory that he encountered when he talked face-to-face with God - what did he wear over his face when he came down to speak with the people? He wore a veil. But we often make this mistake of thinking that he wore the veil because the people couldn't look upon the glory - that's wrong. If you look at what Paul says, he specifies that the glory was passing away, and he didn't want the people to see the glory passing away and fading - that's a picture of the Old Covenant - 'But we, with unveiled face, behold as in a mirror the glory of the Lord'. What does that mean? We have uninterrupted devotion and fellowship with God, and the glory that we imbibe and that is imparted to us in that communion doesn't fade away - it's permanent, it's perpetual, it's continual communion. That is the purest prayer that exists, in my estimation: beholding the face of Jesus. Do you do that when you pray?

If the truth is told, some of us can pray and not even think of Jesus. John 14 verse 23 is probably my most favourite verse in the whole of Scripture: 'Jesus answered and said to him, 'If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him''. That's incredible, the Father and the Son will come and make Their home with us. Listen, this little word 'to', 'We will come to him', the word 'to', 'to him or her', is the Greek word 'pros', and the prefix literally means 'face-to-face'. In John 1 verse 1 you have 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God', and the phrase 'with God' is 'prostontheon', 'pros' again the same word, 'the Word was face-to-face with God, and the Word was God' - that's the relationship the Father had with the Son, yes? What Jesus is saying is: 'If you love Me and keep My commandments, We' - the Father and the Son - 'will come to you face-to-face, and We will make our home with you'. That's the kind of prayer life you need to cultivate if you want to have Divine encounters - face-to-face communion with Jesus, not a shopping list. Ditch the shopping list. I'm not saying don't have intercessory times in your prayer, but for a lot of us: we're just going down a tick box exercise. You know, I honestly believe sometimes we need to shelve the shopping list, sometimes we need to break the alabaster box, whatever's restricting our daily devotions. Sometimes we get into a rut - discipline is good, don't misunderstand me, discipline frees us to worship the Lord, et cetera - but sometimes our discipline can be detrimental to the freedom of the Spirit, when the Spirit is wanting us to come to a place of just sitting and beholding Jesus.

Everyone can have encounters, but not everyone does; encounters are launched from the platform of prayer; thirdly: encounters are hindered by the dominance of the flesh. Encounters are hindered by the dominance of the flesh. Remember Gethsemane? 'Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation, the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak' - and here we have the flesh again in verse 32 with the same three guys: 'But Peter and those with him were heavy with sleep'. The Aramaic phrase, I'm led to

believe, for what Jesus said in Gethsemane, 'the flesh is weak', is 'the flesh is failing' - the flesh is failing. Isn't that so true? I wonder how your flesh is failing you in the pursuit of God? Think about that. How is your flesh failing you in the pursuit of God? Do you fall asleep when you're praying? We all do that. Do you daydream? We all do that. What is it? I don't know, but the flesh is so often sabotaging our pursuit of God. The Passion Translation translates this: 'Your spirit is eager enough, but your humanity is feeble'. Our humanity is feeble! The Message renders it like this, I think this is powerful: 'Part of you is eager, ready for anything in God' - isn't that the way we are? I mean, intellectually, 'Yes, I want that, I want those Divine encounters, I want to experience what Moses and Elijah and Isaiah and Peter, John, and James experienced' - that's what we want in our spirit, 'We are eager and ready for anything, God!'. Listen how The Message renders the rest: 'But another part of you is as lazy as an old dog sleeping by the fire'. Doesn't that depict it well?

Do you know what my biggest struggle is? Me. Not the devil. Not the demon of this or that, or the principality and the power of here or there, but David Legge is my biggest problem. You have heard it many a time from me: sins need to be repented of, wounds need to be healed, and demons need to be cast out and expelled - but, you know, the flesh must be crucified. The cross is spoken of here. Elijah and Moses were speaking to Jesus in His transfigured state about His decease He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. The cross is central to redemption history, and it's central to the redemption of our bodies and indeed our very souls. So encounters are hindered by the dominance of the flesh, these disciples are falling asleep. We must crucify the hindrances of the flesh, otherwise we will not see His glory. Look at verse 32, it says: 'Peter and those with him were heavy with sleep; and when they were fully awake, they saw His glory'. When they wakened up, then they saw Him!

The New Testament is full of this. Ephesians 5:14: 'Therefore He says: 'Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light''. Romans 13:11-12: 'Do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light'. Do you know how the Passion Translation translates when Jesus came in Gethsemane and He found them asleep again? It renders it like this: 'Do you plan on sleeping and resting indefinitely? That's enough sleep, the end has come, and the hour has arrived. Get up and let's go!'. How long am I going to indulge the flesh in such a way that robs me of Divine encounters? We all want God to just show up, don't we, but we're not prepared to crucify the flesh. It has already been crucified on the cross, but we reckon it as dead.

Imagine sleeping in the presence of the transfigured Christ - it's unthinkable! But it happened, and to Peter, John, and James' embarrassment, it's recorded forever. Christ has now risen, He's glorified, His Spirit has been given to us - but most of us, if we are honest, we are asleep! We are living under an open heaven now, if we would only learn to walk by the Spirit and not fulfil the lusts of the flesh.

Encounters are hindered by the dominance of the flesh, but it's not only hindrances from within that rob us of God encounters, but also distractions from without. This is what I want you to see next: encounters are interrupted by the diversionary. Look at verse 33: 'Then it happened, as they were parting from Him, that Peter said to Jesus, 'Master, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles: one for You,

one for Moses, and one for Elijah' - not knowing what he said'. This Divine encounter was kind of suspended because of a distracting preoccupation by lesser things or lesser people. Encounters are interrupted by the diversionary. Here it's Elijah and Moses - great guys, weren't they? Moses, the epitome of the law, the lawgiver representing the pure commandments of the Lord. Elijah, who was probably the greatest prophet, apart from John the Baptist of course, but he represents the prophets. So here are two individual personalities representing the law and the prophets standing on either side of Jesus - they are good people. The tabernacle that Peter is wanting to build for each of them, Jesus, Moses, and Elijah, a tabernacle is a good thing, isn't it? It's a place to worship God, but good people and good things - as good as they are - must all take their rightful place.

As I was thinking about this, God was obviously honouring Moses and Elijah, wasn't He? To be there appearing with Jesus in that transfigured state. So Peter felt, in his motivation, that he was justified in honouring Elijah and Moses along with Jesus. The problem is: honour and worship are different, aren't they? Peter failed to recognise that there was only one of those three that had the glory. I was thinking more about this, and it really convicted me, because Peter didn't leave Jesus out, did he? 'We will make a tabernacle for You, Jesus, and Moses and Elijah'. He just hadn't given Jesus His rightful place - and that is, to me, an illustration of how I so often am. It's not that I leave Jesus out, Jesus is on my lips, Jesus is in my life, Jesus is in my habits, Jesus is in everything I'm doing. It's not that He's not there, it's that He hasn't been given His rightful place! Often because I've exalted others too much.

Do you know what one of the biggest hindrances to revival is? One of the biggest hindrances to revival is drop the 'e' and the 'v', the rival - the rival. Whatever is competing for our affections and our attentions, the diversionary from without - not just the flesh within. That's what Psalm 24:3-4 says, isn't it? 'Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol'. Do you want to have a God encounter on the Mount, the Psalmist says, like the three, Peter, John, and James - not just clean hands, but your soul must not be bowing down to something else.

What is competing for your attention? What are you becoming preoccupied with, engrossed in outside? It could be something religious, because these two guys, Moses and Elijah, were religious figures, and a tabernacle was a religious place. Often our idols - and let's face it, an idol is essentially a religious object, isn't it? - often our distractions and diversions are religious. I'm going to say something that is very unpopular within Evangelicalism, but I'm going to say it anyway, and that is: our doctrines, our doctrines, our Bible doctrines that we derive from this book can be diversions. Our practices, our habits, our procedures, our externals, our ecclesiastical peripheral forms, methods, rites and rituals are so often robbing us of the centrality and the preeminence of the Son of God. They are a distraction! Some of us are happy to be engrossed in them, because they cover up the nakedness of our lack of devotion to Jesus.

So there is always this tension within the Christian life - get used to it. I'm constantly struggling with it, at the moment again - the tension between the good and the best. There are a lot of good things we can be doing, but Jesus told Mary and Martha: 'One thing is needful', to sit at Jesus' feet - and that's the thing that will never be taken away from you, that's the better part. It's incredible, isn't it, that this distraction for

Peter came right in God's glory, right in the Presence! It's the same for Adam and Eve, they were not in a fallen state when they chose a distraction over the presence of God.

We see God's reaction in verse 34: 'While Peter was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were fearful as they entered the cloud', as you would be! This was no ordinary cloud, this was a Shekinah glory cloud. 'Shekinah' is a word that is derived from the root of the Hebrew word 'to dwell', 'shakan', so this is an indication that God has come down in some fashion. There are other indications of that, the glory in the face of Jesus, the light, the whiteness - but Shekinah is often indicated by a word from God, a spoken word. Here you have the cloud coming down, the disciples are fearful, they enter the cloud, and then in verse 35: 'A voice came out of the cloud, saying, 'This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!'.

Really what God is saying here is: 'Pay attention to Him!'. So there is the dominance of the flesh, the falling asleep; there is a diversionary from without, Elijah, Moses, tabernacles - and God comes and overwhelms them, and they get afraid. Guess what: when you have God encounters, you can get scared! Because God, He's not wanting to frighten us, but God is a consuming fire, God is big, God is great, God is awesome. He doesn't want to scare us, in fact that's why He stays away half the time, but when He comes near you feel scared. Some people became as dead men - I don't know if that means they actually died, but certainly they had to get an angelic touch in order to come to again.

But what was the message from heaven? 'Pay attention to My Beloved Son'. So here's my final point: encounters will happen when all your attention and delight is in the Son of God alone. Encounters will happen when all your attention and delight is in the Son of God alone. Do you remember at His baptism, the heavens cleaved and this voice came again, of the Father: 'This is My Beloved Son in whom I am well pleased', or another rendering of it is 'In whom is all My delight'. Do you know what God was saying there? 'This is My Boy, and I don't need any more than Him; all My delight is in Him'. Therein is a rhetorical question: do you need any more than Him? Do I? Is He enough? Is gazing upon His face enough for you? Is dwelling in His presence enough? For many of us it is not. It's not because we don't know about Him, or even know Him to some degree, it's because we've never seen His glory.

Look at verse 36: 'When the voice had ceased, Jesus was found alone'. God took all the other distractions away. It could be - and this could be very, very painful for you - God is allowing distractions to be taken out of your life, so that you will see Jesus alone. It could even be ministry, that's one of the biggest distractions of them all. Matthew renders this verse: 'When they lifted up their eyes they saw no one but Jesus only' - that's what it's about! God is saying to you tonight: 'This is My Boy, this is My Beloved Son, this is the Darling of My bosom. Pay attention to Him, listen to Him. He's enough for Me, He's enough for you!'. So focus all your attention on Him, and delight yourself in Him!

The result of truly seeing His glory was that they were taken up entirely and exclusively with Him. So, if we're going to learn from the three on the Mount and their Divine encounter, we learn that everyone can have encounters, but not everyone does. We need to pursue it and desire it. We learn that encounters are launched from the platform of prayer, but not ordinary prayer, prayer that beholds the face of Jesus - which is the purest prayer of all. As we behold Him, we are transfigured into His

image. Encounters are hindered by the dominance of our flesh within, and interrupted by the diversionary without. Encounters will happen when all your attention and all your delight is in the Son of God alone.

There is a hymn in your Redemption Songs, we're not going to sing it, I think it's 438, I don't know - but listen to the words, a couple of the verses go like this - close your eyes even:

I've seen the face of Jesus -
He smiled in love on me;
It filled my heart with rapture,
My soul with ecstasy.
The scars of deepest anguish
Were lost in glory bright;
I've seen the face of Jesus -
It was a wondrous sight!

And since I've seen His beauty
All else I count but loss;
The world, its fame and pleasure,
Is now to me but dross;
His light dispelled my darkness,
His smile was, oh, so sweet!
I've seen the face of Jesus -
I can but kiss His feet'.

I don't know what you're focused on tonight, the trials or difficulties that you're going through - which is understandable. Or maybe your focus is on some of those religious objects or idols? Or maybe your focus is on the flesh? It may not be the dirty type of immoral flesh that we are so familiar with when we talk about the flesh, but it could be that part of the flesh which is just that you're constantly self-conscious, so conscious of yourself - it's one of the biggest hindrances to beholding the face of Jesus, this self-consciousness. Some of you are Satan-conscious, you know I believe in Satan and I believe in the demonic realm, but I'm fed up of people being so conscious of the devil and demons and all the rest that their eyes are not focused on Jesus. The devil, I believe, is laughing at a lot of it, because he's got you chasing your tail.

Will you lift your eyes up from whatever you're focused on tonight that is not Jesus? That just basically sums it up, whatever is not Jesus that you're focused on, you shouldn't have your eyes on, even the Bible. Even the Bible, yes - the Bible, beyond the sacred page I seek Thee, Lord. The Bible is the revelation of God and God's Son, but some people get stuck at the Bible and make the Bible an idol, but they don't know God. That's what the Pharisees did, they knew their Bible but they didn't know their God when He showed up in human flesh. Will you tonight, in this attitude of prayer right now as we bring this meeting to a close, will you make a conscious decision to take your eyes off - your spiritual eyes, but maybe even your physical eyes - off the objects of fear, off feeding from sin, off religious things, off your own performance and achievements, maybe even off your own prayer life or your spiritual warfare? Would you put your eyes on Him? What must it have been like for those disciples up that mountain, to see Him in all His glory?

Let's just pause for a moment's prayer. I'm going to ask God the Father, in the name of the Lord Jesus, by the Holy Spirit, to reveal the glory of Christ and the light of His face to some of you tonight. Lord Jesus, You know where people are at, You know the grip that some are in through fear, or through the enemy's devices, or through the flesh that so often dominates and hinders us. You know those who are being distracted by diversionary things outside, even rival religious things that have gotten in the way of beholding Your Son. We have heard Your voice tonight, Father, You're calling us to attention, You're roaring from heaven: 'Behold My Son, pay attention to My Son! All My delight is in Him, be satisfied in Him, make Him your pursuit, make Him your passion, make Him your priority. Look away from those other things. Let Moses go, let Elijah go, let whatever else go and see Jesus only'. Will you look into His face? Look into His face. Look into those eyes that are pools of love, dying love, bleeding love, never-ending love, unconditional, never failing love and grace. Some of you need to see the peace that is in His eyes, the peace. Some of you need to see that there is no shame or guilt looking from His eyes to you because of the things that you've done. Some of you who feel the grip of the enemy upon you just need to look into those eyes, and you will be released, you will be released. Keep looking at those eyes and you will be released. Lord Jesus, reveal Yourself. Father, by the Holy Spirit, witness Christ to minds and hearts in this place. He is the Saviour, He is the Redeemer, He is our Deliverer, He is our Healer, and we need to see Him.

Divine Encounters - Chapter 7

"John On The Isle Of Patmos"

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I want you to turn with me to Revelation chapter 1, and we're going to begin reading at verse 9. This is our final study in the 'Divine Encounters' series that was started, I think, back in September, around about then anyway. This is our seventh study, and tonight we're looking at the Divine encounter of 'John the Apostle on the Isle of Patmos'. We're going to read verse 9 through to the end of the chapter.

"I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, saying, 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last', and, 'What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea'. Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp twoedged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength. And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, 'Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death. Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this. The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches'".

Let's pray together, please. Do pray with me that the word of the Lord that He wants delivered will come forth tonight. Father, we humble ourselves in Your presence, and we confess to You that Jesus Christ is Lord of all. He is the Head of the church, He is the Christ of God, He is the Anointed, the Chosen One. We confess that one day, as we sang tonight, soon - we believe it's so - every tongue will confess Him as Lord of things in heaven, things on earth, and things under the earth, and every knee will bow to Jesus Christ, to Your glory, Father. Now, Lord, we are inviting His Lordship, His rule, and His reign, and His kingdom in this place now. We are asking that there would be evidential signs that the kingdom of God has come into our midst. We remember that when He was on the earth, He said 'The kingdom of God is near you'. Lord, we pray that that would be our experience tonight. Your Word says 'The Lord is near, even at your elbow' - may we be conscious of that, Lord. Lord Jesus, come, come quickly, come into our midst now by Your Holy Spirit, we pray. May we all know Divine encounter tonight, in Jesus' name, Amen.

This series we have entitled 'Divine Encounters' has been all about what happens in a moment with God, close encounters of the Divine kind. We've been looking at well-known stories from the historic scriptural record of people who encountered the Lord, but we've been looking at it not from a Bible study capacity as such, or an exegesis of every thought in the Scripture, but rather from the perspective of their Divine encounter, things that we can learn and even principles that we can put into practice to position us to encounter the Lord ourselves. These people, in a moment, were surprised by God's presence. They had a brush with the Lord, sometimes a face-to-face encounter experiencing God. We have emphasised - and I know I have repeated this over and over again, but I think it is vital - we believe in a personal God, and therefore we must expect personal encounters with Him. It's intrinsic to relationship, all relationship, not least our relationship with our God.

So we began looking, I think it was with 'Moses at the Burning Bush', and then we moved on to 'Jacob at Jabbok' where he wrestled with the Lord in the form of the Angel of the Lord. Then we came to Gideon the fearful at the winepress, and there the Lord appeared to him and transformed him. Then Isaiah, in the year that the King Uzziah died, he was transported, as it were, into the Throne room of God. Elijah was on the mountain of course, very dejected and downcast, we would say depressed - and the Lord appeared to him there. Our last study, I think it was last month, was it? We looked at the three on the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter, James, and John; and how the Lord was transfigured in His glory before them, and how they were changed even, as we can be changed beholding the face of Jesus Christ.

Tonight we are looking at John the apostle's encounter on the Isle of Patmos. The book of Revelation, by the way, I'm sure you already know this, is not the revelation of John the Divine, but is the revelation of Jesus Christ. This whole book is not essentially about the end times. That is, most definitely, a lot of the subject matter, but the theme of this book is Jesus, the Son of God. It is an unveiling, that's what this apocalypse is, an unveiling, an uncovering of Jesus Christ - what He is really like now, what He thinks now. It's intriguing, isn't it? I mean, what does the Lord Jesus Christ think of what's going on in the world now? What does He think of what's happening in the church now? What does He think of what's going on with me now? Well, this is an unveiling to John of what the Lord Jesus was like at this moment, and what He wanted the church to know.

What we need more than anything, and more than ever, is a fresh revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ - a new disclosure, manifestation of the Son of God. I hope that this message, to some degree, will bring that closer to you. Let me share with you tonight just four principles. There are probably more, and I think I might even be getting some insight and inspiration as I was reading the passage there, but we will start with the four anyway.

First of all: we see that Divine encounters are often in the context of suffering for Christ. This is a theme that we've already seen in our other studies, that many of the people who encountered the Lord, the run up to that wonderful experience was not a mountaintop but a valley. They might have ended on the mountain top, but it was a valley that preceded it. Here we see John is on the Isle of Patmos, which was like the Alcatraz of the Roman Empire. It was a prison island where they banished people to manual labour. Now, remember who we're talking about here, we're talking about the last surviving disciple of Jesus, an apostle. He is described as 'the disciple whom Jesus

loved' - now, that doesn't mean Jesus didn't love the rest of them, but it meant that in His earthly ministry there was something special between the relationship of Jesus and John. I think it's got more to do with how John pushed in to the love of the Lord Jesus Christ more than the other disciples. Of course, John was one of those three that had the privilege of seeing certain things that the rest of the twelve didn't experience: Jairus' daughter's house, the three were taken in; Gethsemane, the three were there with the Lord Jesus in His agony; and of course we mentioned the Mount of Transfiguration already, it was Peter, James, and John that were there. John is the apostle at the Last Supper who rested his head on the bosom of Christ. John is the apostle of love, you know that from reading his Gospel, from reading the first, second and third epistles of John. He is the one who lingers at the cross, when everybody else forsakes the Lord he is still there. He takes care of the Lord's mother from there on.

But I want you to note that his love - perhaps unrivalled love, at least among the disciples - for Jesus didn't immunise him against suffering. In fact, I would go further to say: it actually kind of qualified him to suffer for Jesus. Now I'm not talking about sickness here, and I'm not talking about all sorts of tragedy and things like that, I'm talking about suffering for Christ, for righteousness' sake. We ought not to be surprised at this. Of course, John again, the same guy, recorded this in his Gospel from the words of the Lord Jesus, John 15:18-20: 'If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master'. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also". Jesus did say: 'In the world', and I assume you're still there, 'you will have tribulation' - put that in your promise box and smoke it! 'In the world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world'.

Paul said in 2 Timothy 3:12: 'Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution'. It's maybe times like this that we wished the Word of God wasn't as certain and sure! You see, if we want Divine encounters, we have to be prepared for dark encounters. Paul's desire was to know Christ - yes? Do you know where he said that? Philippians 3:10: 'that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection', that would be great, wouldn't it? But that comes, as Paul says, with 'the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death'. It's a package, you see - you can't have resurrection without crucifixion.

So Divine encounters, not always, but very often, are in the context of suffering for Christ, suffering with Christ. It was Samuel Rutherford, writing from prison in Aberdeen four centuries ago, who was persecuted for his faith and his expression of his faith, and he was writing his famous letters (which you can still buy today) to his parishioners. He ended one of those letters with this sentence, listen: 'Jesus Christ came into my prison cell last night, and every stone in it glowed like a ruby'. Isn't that wonderful? But it was the context of a cell, the context of suffering for Jesus. We want the encounter, don't we? We don't want the suffering.

The second principle here we see from John is the need for extraction from your normal environment. If you would like a Divine encounter, there is a need, a necessity to be extracted out of your normal environment. The Isle of Patmos was a rocky, desolate island about 10 miles long and 6 miles wide. Of course - I'm not saying God couldn't have given this vision to John anywhere, of course He could have - but it's

very interesting to me that it was in a desolate place of isolation that the Lord came to him. Now obviously this was forced, wasn't it? I mean, John didn't buy a ticket to Patmos for a vacation, he was banished there as a prisoner. We've been talking about Rutherford in his prison cell, but if we don't have forced extractions out of our normal environments, it is incumbent upon us that we choose to extricate ourselves out of our normalcy. Do you understand? If you want a Divine encounter, it's going to require you to bail out of your normal humdrum everyday life - and, by the way, that's part of what I'm seeking to do over the next while, if you read my prayer letter: to get engaged with God again.

We must seek to extract ourselves from the norm in order to seek God. No, I'm not going to go through all the series that we have traversed already, but you remember Jacob? It said 'Then Jacob was left alone', and then all of a sudden he was wrestling with God. He had to get away from everything else. Where was Moses? The backside of the desert, alone except for a few sheep - and God shows up. Where was Gideon? Alone.

I did share this with you, I think, when we looked at Jacob - but it's worthy of repetition. Ron Boyd-McMillan, a journalist for Open Doors, met Wang Mingdao who was the father of the persecuted church in China. He had spent years in solitary confinement - do you remember that story? I'll not repeat it all, just to say, Wang Mingdao said to him: 'When I was in prison all those years I had nothing to do except get to know God. For 20 years that was the greatest relationship I have ever known - but the cell was the means'. He was advising Ron Boyd-McMillan how we in the West are so busy, we're too busy. He says this: 'I was pushed into a cell, but you will have to push yourself into one. You have no time to know God, you need to build yourself a cell so that you can do for yourself what persecution did for me - simplify your life to know God!'.

Now I'm not preaching to you, I'm preaching to myself, I need to do this because I want to encounter God. To encounter God, I need to extract myself from my normal environment. A third thing is the role of being 'in the Spirit'. Do you see what it says here? Not only was he persecuted, we see that in verse 9, but then in verse 10 it says 'I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day'. Now, this appears to mean more than just being in the Spirit as opposed to in the flesh. You know where Paul talks in Galatians 5 about 'walk in the Spirit and you will not fulfil the lusts of the flesh' - I don't think that's what's being talked of here. It seems more like John is speaking of a spiritual experience that was unique to him. I say unique to him in this particular experience that we are reading of in Revelation, but others experienced it also - like a kind of out of body experience where he received the Divine revelation of the book that we have before us tonight.

The idea is that John, in the Holy Spirit, in his human spirit was carried beyond his normal state. This had a role to play in this Divine encounter. John is not the only one who underwent such a - I suppose you could call it 'spiritual transportation'. We read in 2 Corinthians 12 of Paul, speaking of himself although he's trying not to let the cat out of the bag, although it's pretty obvious, 'I know such a man; whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows; how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter'. So he didn't even know whether he was still in his body or outside the body in some spiritual ethereal sense - all we know is that he was caught up, and he experienced something of the

heavenly Paradise.

Now, we're not talking about Astral Projection or anything of Spiritism, we're talking about a biblical experience where someone is transferred into another dimension, perhaps even bodily. Now there certainly might be a visionary element to it as we see from Revelation - this is a vision, of course, an apocalyptic vision, but it appears to be more than that. If we look at chapter 4 and verse 2, we see that this happens to John again: 'Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne'. So he is in the Spirit, and then he is in heaven viewing the Throne room of God. If you go to chapter 17 verse 3, it says: 'So he carried me away in the Spirit', the angel carried him away in the Spirit, 'into the wilderness. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast' - so he was actually carried into the wilderness. If you go to chapter 21 and verse 10, 'And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God'. The Holy Spirit takes his spirit, it would seem, to the mountain of God to show him the New Jerusalem.

We know of other people, like Elijah, who God seemed to just carry away various places, and eventually carried him away to heaven. We read of Philip the evangelist on the road to Samaria, he has been taken from Samaritan arrival out to that road to speak to the Ethiopian eunuch. So this is a biblical experience, and it happens when God enables it. I'm not saying we should spend our life pursuing such experiences, and some experiences are unique to individuals, but I am saying that if you want Divine encounters you need to be open to anything and everything that God wants to do. I think I can say I am. Now, if He was to try something on I might challenge it, I might dig my heels in and lock my legs - that has happened before - but I want to be willing for anything and everything that God would do in order that I would encounter Him. I think I'm being honest in saying to you that I don't care what it looks like to you or anybody else, as long as it's God. Maybe I care a little bit, but I'm trying to get over it.

We should be open to whatever God wants to do to reveal Himself to us. We should be open in God's presence, because it was there at this moment - and I just want you to see this, I picked this up as I was reading in verse 10 - 'I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet'. It was there that the still small voice became a loud voice like a trumpet, it was when he was in the Spirit. You know the way you go through life and you're trying to tune in to the still small voice of God, I hope you're trying to do that, I hope you're starting to hear - and it is a little, gentle whisper, isn't it, in your heart? God has not got a megaphone, he doesn't sound like Charlton Heston, and very rarely does He ever speak with an audible voice like that, even in Scripture, it's quite a rare occasion. But all of a sudden, John is in the Spirit, and behind him there is a loud voice like a trumpet - that's what happens when you're in the Spirit. There is a heightened amplification and sensitivity of your spiritual senses and proclivities.

I want you to also note, a bit like Moses (and this is what I saw when I was reading earlier) 'I heard behind me a loud voice', and then it was when he turned and paid attention to the loud voice that he had a revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Isn't that what happened to Moses? He saw the burning bush, which wasn't anything special for a shepherd, in the wilderness, there were burning bushes all the time - but there was something different about this burning bush that intrigued him, and it says he turned aside to see this great sight, and then God spoke! You see, you've got to turn aside,

you've got to stop in your tracks at the little signs and signals that God is giving, to pay attention to what He's doing - and then He will come in and speak and give direction.

We see this loud voice of a trumpet in verse 10, and then Christ reveals His nature and His message to him - isn't that the way it happens? Look at verse 11: 'saying, 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last', and, 'What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches', etc. It's just like Moses, isn't it? What did Moses have revealed from the burning bush in the voice of God? Something of the nature of God that he had not previously known: 'I am the Lord' - do you remember? Divine encounters are not just for the thrill of it - and they are thrilling, but that's not what the objective is - the objective is: God is revealing something of Himself to you that you didn't know, or at least you didn't know it the way you needed to know it. Yes?

Here we see John is having Christ reveal Himself as Alpha and Omega - this is not a phrase that, as far as I'm aware, has been in the Bible before - and it's a new revelation of Jesus Christ to him, and there is much more being said here concerning the nature of Jesus. Remember that the whole book is the Revelation of Jesus Christ, things that weren't known about Him until now, but also there is with it a message - you remember that with Moses as well, 'I am the Lord, Yahweh, but I'm hearing the cry of My people, their suffering under Egyptian bondage; and I'm going to come down, I'm going to rescue them, and I'm going to choose you to do it' et cetera. So it's not just something new to learn in a revelation of God to us in Divine encounters - I'm not talking about equivalent to canonical revelation, that's not what we're talking about - but there is something that you haven't learned about God that you need to learn about God, and you learn it through Divine encounter; but always there is a message accompanied with it that is intrinsic to the new chapter in your experience with Him.

First of all, it's often in the context of suffering for Christ that we have these Divine encounters. Secondly, there is the need for extraction from your normal environment. Thirdly, the role of being 'in the Spirit'. Fourthly and finally, the Spirit's objective in Divine encounters is always to reveal and glorify Christ, always. John again tells us in John 15:26, the words of our Lord: 'But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me'. 'He will take of My things, and show them and reveal them to your minds and to your hearts'. Here in verse 11 He is revealed as 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last'. Can I just paraphrase that for you? 'It's all about Me', that's what Jesus is saying, 'It's all about Me, from start to finish it's about Me'. Can I say that, if your pursuit of the Divine encounter, or mine, is not to know Christ better, it's a counterfeit pursuit - and it's probably selfish, or even sensual, just for the buzz - and, dare I say it, idolatrous; if it's not a heart-passion to know Him.

Now look at the vision that John gets, verse 12, here we see it: 'Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands'. Here is Christ in the midst of His churches - I want you to understand this, alright? Lampstands, you know the Jewish Menorah that you see in Israel, that was the candlestick that was in the Tabernacle in the Holy Place - and it is a symbol of the witness of God's people, the light that they were to be to the nations. Now in the New Testament it is a symbol of the witness of these assemblies of God's people in these seven Asia Minor cities, and Jesus is walking in the midst of them. Do you know what that is portraying? Jesus is in charge of the church, He's in charge! Whether we

acknowledge Him, recognise Him, or whether He gets a word in edgeways, let alone gets through the door as we see in Laodicea in chapter 3 of Revelation, He's still in charge. He speaks to each of those churches, and to some of them He says 'This is what I'm going to do, if you don't repent, this is what I'm going to do'. It's in relation to their lampstand, their candlestick - and He even talks about taking them away, taking the candlestick away. That's not closing the church, taking their effective witness away if they don't listen to Him.

What's interesting to me here is: John, remember, is the most familiar, we would say the most familiar of the apostles with the Lord Jesus Christ. He knew Jesus of Nazareth better than anybody, but he's overwhelmed by this revelation. Look at verse 17, after the revelation: 'When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead'. Some people think he actually did die, I don't know, but he fell as if he were dead - because this is not how he remembered the Lord Jesus maybe 60 years ago. He's an old man now, this is not how he remembered Him, it's not how he would have described Him. You know, you meet John, and you say to the old man: 'You knew Jesus better than anybody, how do you remember Him?'. If you'd caught John before this event, you'd have heard a totally different story. It's not how he would have described Him to you. Listen, this is vital, it's not how he would have recognised Him. The most familiar with Him, but he would never have recognised Him here; and it's for this reason that he falls down as if he were dead, and he was obviously terrified!

You know, people are terrified of new revelations of Jesus Christ, when He comes to you personally in a new way. It was such an otherworldly sight. I mean look at it, let's look at the specifics, verse 14: 'His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow'. This is an allusion to the figure of the image of the Ancient of Days that is in the book of Daniel - the Jews would have got this. 'His eyes like a flame of fire' - that is the purity, the laser insightfulness and incision of the x-ray vision of the Son of God who sees and knows everything. 'His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace', fine brass has been refined in the molten heat of the furnace, and He's coming now, walking to judge the house of God, the church. 'His voice as the sound of many waters', this is not the still small voice, this is a voice that is like a cataract of thundering waters, the roar, the deafening decibels of a Niagara-like flood, this is the authority of Christ. 'He had in His right hand seven stars', that's the seven churches, they are secure, He's in charge. 'Out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword', that's the word of God as a two-edged sword, dividing spirit and soul, bone and marrow, the discernor of the thoughts and intents, of the heart of every man and woman. 'His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength', this is the glory of God - John would have recognised that from the Mount of Transfiguration, but now it was in an even greater glorified state. When John saw this, he dropped dead, almost.

I think I've said this to you before, maybe not, maybe it was somewhere else, but I believe the Lord Jesus Christ can appear differently to different people in different places. He was transfigured in His glory on the Mount of Transfiguration, He appeared in glory there; but after He was resurrected He appeared in the Garden tomb to Mary as a gardener - well, she thought He was the gardener, she didn't recognise Him. The disciples, remember when He was walking on water, thought He was a ghost. So Peter, James, and John saw Him in glory; Mary saw Him as a gardener; and the disciples saw Him as a ghost - or rather different. What it says here in verse 13 is, John says: 'I saw One like unto the Son of Man'. This is apocalyptic language, it's a vision of course. Jesus, literally, is not like this, this is a vision of the glorified Lord Jesus Christ, how he

saw Him - and I believe the Lord Jesus can appear in different ways to different people. You might disagree with me on that, but note this much: he was petrified.

Here is the irony and the paradox of Divine encounters, particularly in the new covenant - verse 17: 'When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, 'Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last''. How many times in Scripture do you read that somebody dropped like a dead person, or was terrified, and then an angel of the Lord, or the Lord, says to them: 'Don't be afraid'? 'Well, then don't terrify me, don't frighten the living daylights out of me if You don't want me to be afraid!', but you see, He can't help it because He's so other than we are, He's so beyond us that when we even get a glimpse of His glory, His greatness, His magnificence, we are bowled over, nearly snuffed out - but He doesn't want us to be afraid. Isn't that beautiful?

This is the paradox of Divine encounters as New Testament Christians, that you can have the exhilarating thrill of the close shave with God, who is an all-consuming fire, you can have the goosebumps, the hair standing on the back of your neck, and yet in that white-knuckle adrenaline ride, you're totally and utterly safe and secure. It's like Elijah in the cleft of the rock when there was the earthquake, the thunder, the fire - and wasn't that the same cleft of the rock that Moses was in, we saw that, didn't we? Whenever he said 'Show me Your glory', and the Lord said 'I can't show you everything, I can just show you My back parts as I pass by' - but he goes into the cleft of the rock, and he is secure and safe.

The Lord Jesus is dressed in this vision as a Judge-Priest, and I don't want to go into this, but we know this from the sash that He's wearing, and some of the other garments that He adorns. He is a Judge-Priest, He's walking in the midst of the lampstands, He's in charge of His church, He's in the centre of the lampstands, He's revealing Himself as He is, and He's just about to tell those churches what He thinks and what He feels about them. As I finish this message and finish this series, it might seem obvious to say it, but what we need more than anything is to encounter Jesus again. We need to see Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith. We need to behold Him, and we need to hear what He is saying to us today. It's the answer for our lives; it's the answer for our marriages; it's the answer for our children and our grandchildren, our homes; it's the answer for churches, our fellowships, our groups; it's the answer for our communities; it's the answer for our divided country - Jesus, seeing Him as He really is. Not the children's storybook version, not the stained-glass window version, not the Protestant-Catholic version; the way He really is.

A father was trying to get peace to read his copy of the Daily Telegraph one day, and the problem was: every time he settled down his little girl kept asking him questions. So he came up with the bright idea that he would give her something to do while he read his paper. He leafed through one of the missionary magazines that was lying on the coffee table, and he found a map of the world. He cut it out into small pieces, and he said: 'Look, dear, here's a map of the world, see if you can put the jigsaw puzzle together'. He settled down again to read his paper, and in a few minutes she was back, and he couldn't believe it. He asked her: 'How did you do that so fast?'. Like a flash, she said: 'Well, Daddy, it was easy, I found a picture of Jesus on the other side of the page, and I knew when I had Him in the right place then the world would all be right'.

Jesus, be the centre of it all. Jesus is the centre of it all, and it's time we caught up and

recognised it - and, like John, we heard this voice and turned aside, verse 12, to see the voice that spoke. When we turn aside to see what He's really like, and hear what He's really saying; like John we will be overwhelmed, and we will receive a deposit from the Lord of the church, the Judge-Priest of the church, that will transform the church if we heed Him. Let us pray.

Lord, we have prayed this before during this series, and even in the back room before we came out: that You would deliver us from talking about Divine encounters and not having them. We declare tonight in Your presence that You are not a God who is in a history book, You are the Living God, and You're the same tonight as You ever were. What You did before You can do again, and we say tonight: 'Why not here? Why not now? Why not me? Why not, Lord?'. Of course, we know, Lord, even when we ask that question that the 'whys' aren't really on Your side, they are on ours. Forgive us when we have restricted You, when we have confined You, when we have second-guessed You, when we have resisted You, when we have struggled with You, when we have tried to wrestle with You and didn't realise, like Jacob, that we were wrestling against ourselves. Like Moses, when we tried to engineer it our way with the arm of flesh; like Gideon, we have been too afraid to step into the battle, and we have listened more to what the enemy says about us than what You say and see us as. Forgive us, Lord, when we want to build tabernacles and memorials to Moses and Elijah, and don't behold the face in glory of Jesus Christ to be changed to His image, rather than to be fashioned like this man or woman. Lord, we want to know Jesus. Lord Jesus, we want to see You as You really are. I've quoted these verses, Lord Jesus, they are my favourite verses in all of Scripture, I've quoted them in this series; but Lord, I mean it tonight, that You have said to those who keep Your word and love You, You will manifest Yourself to them, and that the Father and the Son will come and make their habitation with that person. Lord, unless these are just empty platitudes, that's got to mean something, and You have to honour Your word. Forgive me for not keeping Your word, for not loving You; but, Lord, teach us to do this, so that we might be a people who are the temple of the living God, upon whom the Shekinah glory of Almighty God rests and indwells. God, You know we need You, we need something new, we need something fresh, and we need a touch. Lord, we're not going to become sensual junkies, just looking for thrills here, there and everywhere - but we know this much: in any relationship, Lord, there has to be those special, intimate times. Lord, we need You to lift us up in Your arms, to caress us, to hold us close, to kiss us. We need Your nearness, we need to encounter You, Lord. I pray for every person here - some have been with us throughout this journey - Lord, would You make real to them, make real to me what we have discovered through Your revelation. May we be different from having been exposed to this truth, for we pray these things in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

God bless you. Thank you for your fellowship for these last couple of years. Thank you for your encouragement. I know that God has great things ahead. God is good. Let me share this with you before I go - two for the price of one now, OK! I prayed this in the prayer meeting, I have been, over this last while, a couple of weeks, I haven't been reading my Bible much - because I've been taking small snippets of Scripture and meditating on them. I've taken about two weeks going through the 23rd Psalm, and today I was in the first phrase of the last verse: 'Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life'. But I'm trying to (and I'm not a Hebrew scholar by any means), but I'm trying to translate it freshly as I'm going through. Do you know what it actually literally means? It's 'goodness and the lovingkindness', or 'the

unconditional limitless love', the 'hesed' in Hebrew, the covenant-keeping faithfulness of God - that's what the mercy means. 'Goodness and God's covenant-keeping faithfulness will follow', that word 'follow' literally means 'to chase, pursue, hunt down', and I translated it like this: 'Your goodness and unfailing love will chase me down in pursuit every day of my life' - now isn't that incredible? I want to speak that over you tonight, whatever the future holds, that God is good all the time, and His goodness and faithfulness are never-failing. Do you know what I wrote in my journal? Even when I'm bad, which is now and again, when I'm in badness His goodness chases me down in pursuit. So, here's a wee tip, and I'm trying to learn it: stop looking for the badness, and every day - from here in, OK? - every day, every day look for the goodness of God; because He promises that it will be there. God bless you.

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