

The Glory of His Presence

Several years ago while visiting the local museum in Charleston, South Carolina, my eyes feasted on the long corridors filled with Civil War memorabilia, old dishes, Indian artifacts and other articles from the city's past. I was particularly drawn to a display of period clothing—everything from gentlemen's dress coats to children's christening gowns—dating back to the early 1700s and 1800s.

In one showcase hung several beautiful old wedding gowns, some with long trains. Intrigued, I read the plaque that described a "train" as one continual piece of fabric extending from the gown itself. Traditionally, it was made from the same piece of fabric as the back panel of the dress—no cuts, breaks or seams.

Often, a train depicted a girl's station in life. If she was from a wealthy family, her train might extend several feet behind her. If she was from a working class family, her train might be only as long as her dress. If she was of royal descent, her train might fill the church.

As I stood reading this explanation, a Scripture came to mind, flooding my spirit with a vivid image: "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple" (Is. 6:1, NKJV).

Seated on the Throne

Suddenly I was overcome with a deep awareness of who God is—with a fresh revelation of His holy presence seated upon the throne, filling His temple. I don't think God's presence had ever been so real to me as it was at that moment. I was overwhelmed by the living reality that God's presence upon His holy throne flows down, filling His church like a royal

train—filling *me*.

While my eyes continued to gaze upon the wedding gowns, my heart took in this new understanding. So often when we think of God's presence we detach Him from His presence *upon His throne*, much like a modern bride detaches the train from her gown after the wedding ceremony.

When it comes to the presence of God, however, we cannot detach His presence from who He is upon the throne. God is holy. He reigns supreme. Everything He does, He does through His holiness and sovereignty—*upon the throne*.

This has been a tremendous season for the church. God's mighty winds of refreshing and renewal have touched us all in recent years. But these outpourings, as wonderful as they are, cannot be an end in themselves.

We must not detach an experience of God's presence from a relationship with who He is! We have seen the bush that burns; now we must be willing to see the One who ignites the flame.

As I stood overcome by these truths, I forgot that I was in the middle of an old museum. Tears filled my eyes, but I was too enraptured with the Lord to care who saw me.

I had walked with God since childhood. I had experienced His hand of healing as He restored my sight. I had observed arms and legs growing out, seen individuals delivered and set free, even smelled His fire as smoke filled the auditoriums where I was worshiping. But until that moment I had never truly seen *His presence*—and it changed my life.

People of His Presence

Seeing the Lord high and lifted up elicited a cry from Isaiah: "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" (Is. 6:5).

Isaiah saw not only God's presence upon the throne, but also His holiness. Likewise, we cannot cry out to see God's glory unless we are willing to see our condition of need in the light of His presence.

At Isaiah's cry a seraphim took a coal off the altar and laid it upon his lips. From then on Isaiah walked as a man with scarred lips, signifying his separation unto God.

We, too, must be separated as vessels for God's presence. First Corinthians 3:16-17 states, "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are."

As God's holy temple, we must embrace the fact that our lives are not our own. We have been bought with a price, redeemed by God. And we have an indwelling throne.

"For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.' Therefore, 'Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you'" (2 Cor. 6:16-17).

The word of God is specific. There is no room for mixture in the life of a believer. We are set apart when we become joint heirs with Christ. But are we, like Isaiah, willing to be "scarred"?

For years the world has looked at the church with a great deal of reproach. We have become a source for relentless jokes and frequent derision. I used to get angry as I watched ministers and ministries being raked across the coals in print or on T.V. until I realized what the world is crying out for: It wants the church to be *different*!

Paul admonished the believers of Jehovah to be separate, to come out from among the unclean things of the world. But too

often people look at the church and say, "I see no difference." Lets hope God does not look upon us with the same opinion!

We have a destiny to fulfill—a destiny grounded and rooted in the very throne of God. We are destined to be a people of His presence, revelers around His holy throne. Today God's presence is filling His temple. He is burning away all that is displeasing. He is asking serious questions and is looking for committed responses.

I tell my congregation that every time I go to the Lord these days, He has His hand out, requiring more and more of me. That's as it should be. Relationship means sacrifice. It means giving up what I want to follow after what He wants. It means yielding my will to His will, surrendering my desires to His.

Let us not allow our hunger to know God to get lost in our desire to see, feel and experience His mighty acts. Let us not become manifestation-conscious rather than relationship-conscious.

Isaiah 60:1 states; "Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the Lord is risen upon you." The glory of God's presence will arise as we seek His face and walk in obedience and relationship with Him. Jesus stood in the midst of His disciples and boldly declared, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). Isn't it about time that we too walk consumed with the nature and the character of our Father, testifying continually of His ways?

The Lord God, seated on His holy throne, is calling us to know Him not just for what He does, but also for who He is. Today, right now, His presence is filling His temple! The question is, will we allow Him to set us apart and fill us, too?

Cynthia Duggan is on the pastoral staff of Living Fountain Ministry in Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina. She serves as academic dean at Living Fountain Bible Training Center.