

THE ONE THING

PART ELEVEN – THE FIRST & THE LAST

REVIEW

Friends, we are now on the final part of our series where we are learning about the importance & power of spending time fellowshiping with God. As we've learned, this "One Thing" is what the Scriptures teach us is the thing which is needed and it's the vital part of our Christian life.

We learned this from the story of Martha & Mary where Martha was "troubled about many things" in the kitchen while her sister Mary was spending her time just sitting at Jesus' feet, hearing His Word. This is when Jesus said that Mary had chosen that good part which would not be taken away from her.

You see, this good part of our salvation is spending time in the presence of the Lord, and as Jesus went on to say, it is the one thing that is needful. This is how we need to see our time spent at Jesus' feet too! Yes, the time we spend seeking His face is not only needful; it is vital! It really is! Yes, more than how many souls we win or how many works we do, getting to know God is the life that we are called unto. Sure, these other things are important too, but they come as a fruit of our fellowship with God and are not what constitutes our relationship with God itself. Yes, spending time with Him is what will make us even more fruitful for Him, because as we've learned, this is where the power to do these things comes from. Amen?

So the way we have been studying this most recently is by looking at the various relationships that God has given us on the earth. So, through the parent/child, the husband/wife, and the friend-to-friend relationships, we can learn what our relationship with God should look like. Yes, learning what makes these relationships work teaches us what makes our relationship with our Heavenly Father & Heavenly Husband work too.

The last couple of Sundays, we have specifically been looking at what being a close friend of God looks like. We looked at what Jesus said to His disciples in John chapter 15 and then looked at a couple of the LORD's friends in the Old Testament, Moses & Abraham.

Now several weeks back, the Holy Spirit showed me the way we would end this study of "The One Thing" when He reminded me of how this is referred to in two of our most beloved Psalms, the 23rd & 91st Psalms. Yes, in both of these Psalms, you see two different men of God (i.e. David & Moses) sharing essentially the same thing – one at the end of his psalm and the other at the beginning. So what we are going to do today is conclude our series by sharing with you the power that this time spent in His presence holds in our lives.

DWELLING IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD FOREVER

So let's begin with the one that is shared at the end of the Psalm – Psalm 23 (the subject that I plan for us to look at in a couple of weeks – a study of the good life found in Psalm 23!):

First of all, I want you to notice that in verses 5-6 of this Psalm, there is a transition: The example of a Shepherd and His sheep is no longer being used. Now David is using the analogy of a person being invited into someone else's home and being shown great hospitality and honor. So, these last two verses of the 23rd Psalm show us another part of God's nature. Not only is He that Good Shepherd who takes care of His sheep; He is that Honorable Host who crowns us with His lovingkindness and tender-mercies.

Yes, He prepares this table before us and makes all things good and ready! Upon entering, He honors us by anointing our head with oil! He fills our cup up to overflowing! Then our response ought to be what David said in verse 6, *“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”* (Psalm 23:6) Amen!

But my point is found in this last statement made in Psalm 23 – *“And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.”*

Now, first of all, “one thing” that is important to understand about this reference to “the house of the Lord” is that it is not a *physical place*. I understand that we like to refer to our church buildings as “the house of God,” but these physical structures we gather in are not truly God's house. That's right: one *cannot* say God's house is here or it is there – for the house of the Lord is wherever we take it because our bodies are now God's temples.

Do you remember the account where Jesus was ministering to the woman at the well and He told her that the time was coming where we will not worship the Father on that particular mountain or in the city of Jerusalem, but the time was coming where those that worship the Father must worship Him in spirit and in truth? Jesus said that God is spirit, and this is why the time was coming where God's people were not going to have to go to a specific place to worship anymore. Therefore, this is a spiritual place, the house of the Lord where His presence abides.

Even when these Old Testament saints referred to the “house of the Lord,” they were not referring to simply a physical structure. It would not have been realistic that David would have been referring to a physical place either because how many of you know that we cannot stay in one physical structure forever? No, you cannot go to church every day just as the Jews could not constantly live in the Temple or Tabernacle. So, David was evidently talking about something else when he referred to the “House of the Lord.”

Now repeat after me: “Pastor Trey... wants me... to come to church.” Going to church is important, saints! For it is uniting together in fellowship to be equipped and encouraged

that keeps us from straying from the pack and becoming easy prey for the roaring lion. But how many of you know that there is something more important than going to church? There sure is, and that is regularly going to the house of the Lord!

So, what was David referring to here? Well, to the Jewish mind, the house of the Lord (i.e. the Tabernacle and then the Temple) was synonymous with God's presence. Yes, they saw "the house of the Lord" as the place where God dwelt – in the holy of holies of both the Tabernacle and the Temple. So, what David was literally saying was that He was certain that he would dwell in God's *presence* forever. No, not in the holy of holies, but that God would be with Him wherever he went.

AND I WILL ... FOREVER

But notice how David said, "And I *will* dwell in the house of the Lord forever." Not, "And I *hope* or *maybe* I will dwell there." No, He was confident that he was going to dwell in the Lord's presence forever. There was no question in his mind. And this is the confidence we should have as well – that we are not "in and out," one day God's there and the other He's not. No, we should know that His presence is *present* forever.

I say this because there is an epidemic in the Body of Christ – a wrong belief system – that the Holy Spirit may come and alight on us one day, but as soon as we "grieve" Him, He flies away like a bird out of a tree. This is simply not true! Jesus promised us that when the Helper has come, He will abide with us forever (see John 14:16). So, He is not in us one day and gone the next. No, He remains with us forever. Even when we sin. Even when we say and do stupid things. He abides.

So, that is the first piece of encouragement that we should receive from this phrase – that we don't have to worry about God's presence departing from us if we are born again, Spirit-filled believers. Nothing can separate us from His love! He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5 & Deuteronomy 31:6). Jesus said, "I am with you always even to the end of this world" (Matthew 28:20). So, we need to be fixed in the truth that God is always with us, that He will never leave us nor forsake us, and that we will dwell in His presence forever.

Now "forever" does not just indicate *eternally* after we die either. It certainly includes forever into eternity, but it includes right now as well. In other words, dwelling in the house of the Lord starts and is made available the moment we are born again and continues throughout the rest of our life here in these tents and will continue when we leave this earth and live in the glory of God's kingdom.

Jesus taught us this very thing in saying that eternal life begins now. It doesn't just start when we die. No, eternal life is meant to begin now in this life when we receive the Lord Jesus as our Lord & Savior. And somebody help me, but what is eternal life according to John 17:3? It is knowing God! So knowing God is supposed to start now, in this life, not just when we die and go to heaven. Therefore, like David, we can say, "I will dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life!"

So dwelling the house of the Lord is not just something that is available to us from time to time or as the Lord wills. It is something that is promised us forever – partly because the Lord Himself has promised that He will always be with us. Therefore, we have God's presence with us all of the time as God's children, and we *will* dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

But this is also available experientially as well – for as we learned, the house of the Lord is His presence. Therefore, we have the promise of His presence being available to us forever. Again, this all starts with experiencing “eternal life” which is knowing God. So, as we seek to know God, having relationship & fellowship with Him, we experience now what is available to us forever. Amen.

So let's look at some other verses that refer to God's “house” and look at the benefits of dwelling in His house ...

THE FRUIT OF BEING PLANTED IN HIS PRESENCE

Psalm 92:12-14 teaches us that as we are planted and abide in the Lord's presence (i.e. His house) that we will blossom and sprout with a spiritual harvest (i.e. we will be spiritually rich with the life of God). It's just like how a tree works: A trunk of a tree pumps sap into the branches which force the branches to produce or else they'll drown. Likewise, as we remain plugged into Jesus, He pumps His life into us and forces us to produce His fruit.

As we've seen, this was David's great desire because he knew just how wonderful time spent in the Father's presence was! Yes, he knew its benefits! Notice what he said after expressing his heart in the **27th Psalm** ...

He said at the end of **verse 4** - *“to behold the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in His temple.”*

You know, there are some things you just will not know outside of fellowshiping with God in His presence. You will not be able to behold the beauty of the Lord outside of His house. In other words, you will not be able to see how truly good and gracious He is. Yes, some things are better caught than taught! I could stand up before you Sunday after Sunday, telling you how good God is and how awesome He is, but if you do not get in His presence for yourself and behold Him yourself, there are some things you just will not see. So we need to get in His “house” and gaze upon Him (i.e. behold Him). This is when, not only will we be able to truly see Him as He is, but also, we will be changed into the same image from glory to glory! (See 2 Corinthians 3:18) Amen!

Yes, saints, His temple is where we are able to truly “inquire” of the Lord and learn all about His ways. In other words, in His presence is where we get answers. Have you ever noticed that the things God speaks directly to you are the things that stick and you remember the most? That's because the Lord Himself will always be your best teacher.

But notice what David went on to say next in **verse 5** – David says, *“For in the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion. In the secret place of His tabernacle He shall hide me; He shall set me high upon a rock.”*

So here, David explains another major reason why dwelling in the presence of God all the days of His life was His greatest desire: Not only did He get to experience the myriad of blessings associated with spending time in God’s presence; he also knew that this was the key to being hidden and protected in the time of trouble. Therefore, we can see that dwelling in God’s presence - just you and Him, fellowshiping and spending time with each other - is where we are sheltered from harm and trouble. It is here that we are shielded and defended from the snares of the fowler. (See Psalm 91:3) Amen.

But His presence does not just offer us protection from the enemy, it is where we truly become satisfied and content. **Psalm 36:8-9** teaches us this: In verse eight, David begins by saying, *“They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of your house...”*

The “they” being referred to here are those who know their God and, therefore, position themselves under the shadow of His wings (see verse 7). So, what does he say is the benefit of drawing near to Him like this? We are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of the house of God.

Therefore, the way David says that we become abundantly satisfied (or you could say, extremely content) is by entering the fullness of God’s presence. This, of course, corresponds with Paul’s secret to contentment that we find in **Philippians 4:13** – for our contentment level is directly tied to abiding in the presence of the Lord. Amen?

We see this principle reflected in **Psalm 16:11** as well when King David said, *“In Your presence is fullness of joy.”* So, it sounds like the key to being full of joy and abundantly satisfied in our hearts is learning to live in the fullness of God’s presence. Or you could say, the more of the Lord’s presence that we are abiding in, the more content and satisfied we will be. Amen.

Saints, there is no substitute for His presence! It brings fullness of joy, contentment and satisfaction. Therefore, the only reason that we ever become discontent in life is because we are not drawing the strength for our contentment from the presence of Christ. Yes, if we ever feel like we need anything other than Christ, then we are showing signs that our heart is gravitating towards these other things and away from the Lord.

The rest of Psalm 36:8 goes on to say, *“...and you give them drink from the river of your pleasures.”*

Didn’t Jesus say that if anyone thirsts, let them come to Him and drink (John 7:37)? You see, true satisfaction comes from nowhere else other than being close to Him and drinking from His well of salvation. He alone can satisfy our deepest needs – not a spouse, a job, or a hobby – just as water is the only thing that can satisfy us when we truly thirst. There is

no substitute for Christ in this dry and thirsty land just like there is no substitute for water in a naturally dry and thirsty land.

Then notice what King David says in verse nine: *“For with You is the fountain of life; In your light we see light.”*

David goes on to say here that it is only being with Him (that is, in His presence) that you and I can experience the fountain of life. What is this fountain of life? It is God Himself – for He referred to Himself as the fountain of living waters (Jeremiah 2:13). So, when we are “with Him,” the life of God can continuously flow through our very being making us perpetually satisfied and content.

David also said that in His light we see light. In other words, when we are in His presence (for God Himself is light), we can see more clearly and our perspective will change. The things we used to think were important and that we had to have will no longer be our priority and focus. That’s right – in His presence we will be able to see what is important with an unclouded perspective and will truly walk in the light as He is in the light. (See 1 John 1:7)

My friend, there are so many benefits to the presence of God in our lives. Like we have just seen, it produces light and it is our fountain of life. Yes, His presence is to us spiritually what sunlight and water are to us physically.

So, we can clearly see that dwelling in the Lord’s “house” – that is, His presence – has a myriad of benefits. It abundantly satisfies our soul! It causes us to grow and flourish and bear fruit for the glory of God! It protects us from many of the onslaughts of the enemy! But, I believe most importantly, it grants us entrance into a rich and vibrant fellowship with the Lord that we are all called to inherit! And we can continue and grow in this all of our lives. We can still bear more fruit in old age by spending time in his presence, still continue flourishing!

WHAT IS THE SECRET PLACE?

Now let’s go over the other Psalm I mentioned at the beginning that shows us “this One Thing” at the beginning of the Psalm itself – Psalm 91.

In **Psalm 91:1**, Moses begins by saying, *“He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.”*

So what this verse is saying is that when one dwells in this secret place of El Elyon, he or she will abide under the shadow of El Shaddai. In other words, when we do the first part, the second part becomes our reality – and that second part is being under His spiritual umbrella, which is all the protection that we find in the 91st Psalm.

So abiding under the shadow of the Almighty is indeed important, is it not?

So here is the logical question: If dwelling in the secret place of the Most High is what causes us to abide under the shadow of the Almighty, then shouldn't we endeavor to find out what dwelling in the secret place means?

But I want us to notice again the terminology that is used in Psalm 91:1: Notice that the Psalmist refers to "dwelling" in the secret place and "abiding" under the shadow of the Almighty. This is not just an occasional visit to these places; this is living in them! Therefore, this excludes the "nod to God" crowd (i.e. those whose relationship with God consists only of attending the occasional church service or doing sporadic religious exercises). No, this is referring to the one who lives in the secret place, those who daily remain in that secret place and daily under that shadow.

So, what is the secret place? If dwelling in this place is so important to the rest of God's promises in Psalm 91, by all means, we need to know what the secret place is!

Well, the first thing we need to know about the secret place of the Most High is that it is not meant to be secret *from* us; it is secret *for* us. There is a big difference.

The secret place is the place God has prepared for those who love Him. It is the place the Lord has made available for His disciples. Just as Jesus said concerning the mysteries of the kingdom, they are hidden and reserved for His disciples, not just the casual Christian. Likewise, the secret place is hidden for us. It is secret to all outsiders – and this includes the enemy. It is that hiding place that the Psalmist referred to, where the Lord hides us from all harm.

But what is important to understand about this secret place is that it is not a physical place. One cannot say that it is here or it is there.

Do you remember the account where Jesus was ministering to the woman at the well and He told her that the time was coming where we will not worship the Father on that particular mountain or in the city of Jerusalem, but the time was coming where those that worship the Father must worship Him in spirit and in truth? Jesus said that God is spirit, and this is why the time was coming where God's people were not going to have to go to a specific place to worship anymore. Now we can make any place that secret place because as we choose to enter into that spiritual place, we are entering into that secret place where God is. Therefore, the secret place is a spiritual place.

So, let's first turn over to Matthew chapter 6 to discover more of what this secret place is:

In **Matthew 6:6**, Jesus was teaching about the necessity of having a private prayer life. His main point was to teach His followers how we need to avoid the hypocrisy of the religious leaders of His day – how they prayed for public praise and recognition and how they prayed just to be seen of men. And in this verse, He said, *"But you, when you pray (notice how having a private prayer life was not an option; it was expected), go into your room (KJV- "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."*

Now notice, first of all, that Jesus said that we are to pray to our Father who is in the secret place. Who is in the secret place? The Father is in the secret place! So we can correctly conclude that our Heavenly Father is Who and What is in the secret place. Therefore, when we go into our “prayer closet” we are going into the presence of our Father. We will see more of this in a moment, but I want us to look deeper into this by looking at this word “room.”

This word “room” comes from the Greek word *tameion* and, in their day, this word described something quite different than a closet or just a general room; this word described a bedchamber. Therefore, it described a place of privacy and intimacy.

In other words, it was a place where just you and the Father go. Just like when a married couple has visitors into their home, they openly welcome them in the dining room, in their living room, and even into their kitchen and bathroom, but our bedroom is usually not the place where we let our guests go. Why? It is because that is our private place where we share intimacy with our spouse.

So the secret place (i.e. our prayer closet) is the place where just you and God go – just you and Him. It is that intimate place where you go to fellowship with Him where no one else can follow you. Just as we do not let people into our bedrooms, others cannot go into our secret place with the Lord either.

Do you remember that passage of Scripture where Jesus said to His disciples – “the place that I go you cannot go...”? Well, while the common consensus was that He was talking about God’s presence in heaven, I believe He was also talking about God’s presence here on the earth. In other words, He was talking about the secret place – that place of intimacy where no one could go with Him. Now they could certainly have that private place with the Lord – just them and Him. But they could not follow Him into His prayer closet because that was only reserved for Him and His Father alone.

So we can see that the secret place is that spiritual place where the Father is. It is that place where just you and Him go to spend time with one another. In other words, it is His presence!

We see this throughout the Psalms as well, where the Hebrew word translated “secret” in Psalm 91:1 is used. Let’s look at some of them:

1. **Psalm 31:20** says – “*You shall hide them in the secret place of your presence.*” This verse very specifically teaches us that the secret place, the shadow of Shaddai as referred to in Psalm 91:1, is found in the presence of God.
2. If you compare what we just saw in Matthew 6:6 (that the secret place of prayer Jesus was referring to was *where the Father is*) to **Psalm 32:7 & 119:114** where this same Hebrew word for “secret” is used, we are told – “*You are my hiding place ...*” Therefore, God (our Father) Himself is our secret place.

3. We see in both **Psalm 27:5** & **61:4** that this secret, hiding place is “in the Lord’s tabernacle” – which, to me, is an obvious reference to the presence of the Lord as the house of God was used by the Hebrews synonymously with the presence of God.
4. Now there are the other references to the “secret place” as being “in darkness” (**Psalm 18:11**) and “of thunder” (**Psalm 81:7**), but to me those are simply manifestations of the manifest presence of God at times.

So we can clearly see here that the secret place is the secret place *of His presence*! Yes, saints, we have learned that dwelling in the secret place is dwelling in God’s presence – just you and Him, fellowshiping and spending time with each other. It is that place of intimacy with the Lord that cannot be shared. It is that place that is hidden to outsiders – and that includes the enemy. On top of that, this verse says that this is the place where we are hidden in this secret place, where all of His provision & protection dwell.

Speaking of “dwelling” ...

IT ALL COMES DOWN TO DWELLING

I want you to notice that in several of these verses that we have looked at today, the Holy Spirit used the word “dwell.”

First of all, in one of our keynote verses – **Psalm 27:4** – we see David saying, *“One thing I have desired of the Lord, that I will seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life.”* Then we saw David use it again in **Psalm 23:6** when he said, *“And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.”* Finally, this is also the same terminology used in **Psalm 91:1** when Moses said that *“He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.”*

The word “dwells” is one of the terms you see repeated in all three of these verses. To dwell means to remain in a place, like to live there. We call our homes, our “dwelling,” right?

So this is obviously not just an occasional visit to God’s house; this is living there! That is what this word “dwells” indicates, which I see as being the Old Testament counterpart to the New Testament word “abide.” Therefore, this excludes the “nod to God” crowd (i.e. those whose relationship with God consists only of attending the occasional church service or doing sporadic religious exercises). No, this is referring to the one who lives in the place of His presence, those who daily “dwell” in His house.

But the word “dwell” also is used in terms of a mental exercise. It means to think about something for an extended period.

So it can refer to both one’s physical residence and to mental focus. In a physical sense, it means to live or stay in a particular location. Mentally, it often implies thinking or speaking about a subject, especially in a way that may be considered excessive.

This is interesting in that this is actually one of the main ways in which one dwells in God's presence – through setting their minds on the things conducive to His presence. In other words, when we dwell in our minds on spiritual things, we feel them. Yes, when we meditate on things that are true, good, noble, lovely, etc. we experience life & peace. So dwelling upstairs (i.e. in our minds) on spiritual things is the key to dwelling in God's presence.

Church, the benefits to His presence are unending! We have seen that we come to know Him more in His presence. We have our questions answered in His presence. We are protected in His presence. Our hearts are full in His presence. We become more fruitful through His presence. The benefits are endless!

And the way that we experience these benefits is by first “dwelling” on Him. This is how we experience His presence. Then as we “dwell” in His presence, the fruit of this one thing is boundless!

So, friends, this is that “one thing.” It is the one thing that we need to be sure to have in our lives and it is the one thing that all the rest of our religion springs forth from. Let's pursue His presence like a junkie! Let's hunger and thirst for fellowship with Him as if our life depended on it! Let's make this one thing the main thing in our lives!