

## **Sermon Three: The Uniqueness of Jesus: He Alone Honours the Body**

In the 57th chapter of Isaiah there is a verse of scripture that wonderfully expresses the two aspects of God's nature that Jesus also refers to in the 17th chapter of John's Gospel. At verse 15 of Isaiah 57 we read:

"15 For thus says the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with those who are contrite and humble in spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite."

The two aspects of God's nature described here are his transcendence and his immanence or nearness. His transcendence is captured in the first part of the verse where it says that he is the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity. His nearness is captured when God declares "I dwell with those who are contrite and humble in spirit".

To say that God is transcendent is to profess that he is above His creation. He is not dependent upon His creation. He inhabits eternity. This means that God dwells in that place beyond time and space. Heaven is that dimension that cannot be accessed by us as his creatures this side of death. This is one of the ways in which Isaiah describes the transcendence and holiness of God. He is above everyone-perfect and holy.

But not only is God transcendent, He is also immanent. He is not only above all, but He is through all and in all. This means He is in this universe in which you and I live. He is motivating it and He is moving it according to His plan and purpose. Because he is immanent he has revealed his character to us. We can know God and it is in knowing him that life is truly meaningful.

As we come to an awareness of God's immanence we recognize that not only is God in this universe and our world but he wants to dwell within us. Remember what it says in Isaiah "I dwell in the high and lofty place, and also with those who are contrite and humble in Spirit."

St. Peter has this understanding of God's immanence in mind when he writes in his first Letter at chapter 5:6 "And all of you must clothe yourselves with humility in your

dealings with one another, for "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." 6 Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. 7 Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you."

What is important here is to realize that the Biblical teaching on humility is unparalleled in other religions. This is because to truly understand why we are to be humble we have to understand God's nearness. God dwells with the humble because when he became one of us he humbled himself.

Jesus taught us that we are to live as he did and the passage from John 17 accentuates this for us. "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, 2 since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. 3 And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. 4 I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. 5 So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

Do you see in these verses the interplay between the transcendent and the immanent? Jesus begins by praying that the Father will glorify him so that he may glorify the Father. Jesus is talking about how on the Cross he will indeed Glorify the Father as he dies for the Sin of the World. This glorifies the Father because as the holy, transcendent one who inhabits eternity God cannot abide sin. Because he is moral and righteous there needs to be a punishment for sin. Jesus pays that penalty and so glorifies the Father. The Father will glorify the Son by raising him from the dead and then will restore him to that place where he, Jesus, shared in that glory before the world existed. Here Jesus clearly identifies himself with the God who inhabits eternity and so is declaring his own transcendence. But look at what is said in verses 2 and 3. Here Jesus says that he has been given authority over all people that he may give real and eternal life to all in his charge. Look how he then describes eternal life. This is very specific: "That they may know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."

Jesus is saying that to have eternal life is to know the only true God who sent Jesus. Here is the immanence of God. In verses 6-9 his nearness is expanded on when Jesus prays: "I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. 7 Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; 8 for the words that you

gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me."

This is one of the clearest statements in the Gospels about how we can in humility come to know the indwelling presence of God. It involves our receiving as true the words of Jesus and to also believe that he was sent from heaven to earth so that we can know that God wants to dwell with those who are humble.

The Bible alone of all Spiritual Books teaches that God through his Spirit seeks to dwell within every human being. As we apply these words of Jesus to our lives we come to see that we have eternal life now because we know that Jesus has come from the Father. As we receive in our conscious minds Jesus words as true, believing that God sent Jesus, something happens to these bodies of ours. They become the Temple for His Holy Spirit. When we think about this it elevates our bodies in such a way that we come to recognize that Jesus alone truly honours the body because only Christianity sees human beings and not a building as the Temple of God. Think this through with me. If your body and mine are to be the temple of the Holy Spirit, the dwelling place of God, it means that this body you and I inhabit is deemed worthy of respect.

Islam has an understanding of God's transcendence but no theology of God's immanence. It says in the Quran at Surah 4:171: "Allah is only one God; far be it from His glory that he should have a son" When the phrase "far be it from his glory that he should have a son" this means that because he is so different from us (is so transcendent) Allah could not have a son". God could not identify for us in this way. Now when this verse is seen in comparison to what Jesus prays in John 17 there is a contradiction. Twice Jesus refers to his being sent by the Father, the only true God. For Islam to teach that Allah is utterly transcendent has an important implication. Fazlur Raham, a Muslim Scholar at the University of Chicago, spends the first chapter of his work Major Themes of the Quran discussing what he views as the Quranic teaching regarding the doctrine of Allah: "The Quran is no treatise about God and his nature; His existence, for the Quran is strictly functional." When you have a theology of God's transcendence but no theology of immanence this is bound to happen. If God is so completely other we cannot know him The Bible on the other hand is primarily a book that is about God and his nature. Again think of Jesus' words in the prayer: "This is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." Jesus is saying that eternal life and knowing who God is are the

same thing Do you see how different this is from the teaching of Islam?

In all pantheistic religions the body is seen as an extension or continuation of the universe. There are millions of gods. Just as they are indistinct so too human beings do not have distinct personalities. A doctrine of reincarnation underscores this. While in this life I may be Jonathan Gibson, in my next life I could be reborn in either human or animal form. This implies that I am not uniquely Jonathan. The goal of Hinduism, the primary pantheistic religion, is to achieve Moksha or Nirvana, a release from rebirths and a merging with the Oneness of the universe. To merge with the oneness of the universe means that in the end there is no distinction. I will not be distinct from you or from God for that matter. This is a very different view from the one the Bible teaches. It says I will always be Jonathan, just as you will always be the person you are. Therefore we will always be separate from God and each other. Yet we will become ever more like Christ, reflecting his nature as he dwells within our earthly bodies until that day when we will have a resurrected body.

It is because Christianity alone has a fully developed theology of God's transcendence and his immanence that we have such high view of the body. The Christian understanding of the right of every individual life, even the one still on the mother's womb, the pleasure and consummation of sexual delights, reserved for the sanctity of marriage; the injunction against suicide; the care and protection of one's health; the injunction against killing; and the command to love others and to work for their good, all of these flow from the fact that this body of ours is in the place where God dwells because he is immanent.

But having lost this truth what are we left with? Pornography and the cruel degradation of men, women and children, death in the womb, in the name of personal rights; the breakdown of the family for a myriad of reasons, the profaning of sex in our entertainment industry, violence in unprecedented proportions. In losing the high value that God has placed on the body we are in a free fall, at the mercy of greed, cruelty and lust.

As Christians let us live in such a way that we recognize that we are his Temple and every human being is intended to be the same. As Ravi Zacharias writes: "As Christians we do not turn in a certain direction to pray. We are not bound by having to go to a building to commune with God. There are no unique postures and times and limitations that restrict our access to God. The Christian does not go to the Temple to

worship. The Christian takes the Temple with him or her. Jesus lifts us beyond the building and pays the human body the highest compliment by making it his dwelling place, the place where he meets with us."

It is as we more fully mediate on the uniqueness of this teaching that we will with awe and wonder realize that the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: is also the one who dwells with us the contrite and humble in spirit. It is because God is both transcendent and immanent that Jesus honours the body in a way that is unique.