

#117 “A Sense of Awe”

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The first Christians were described as feeling a sense of awe (Acts 2:42-47). In Acts, it seems that there was an excitement to assemble together, even on days besides Sunday. It has been only on rare occasions in my Christian life that I have felt a sense of awe among the community of faith. In each and every occasion when this did happen, it was clearly a work of God and devoid of any manmade manufacturing. Every time it was when a group of Christians were gathered together who, more than anything else, wanted to know God, serve Him, and love Him more. We all arrived with an attitude of seeking God with all of our hearts. I have been in few churches where there was a clear sense of awe. New conversions were happening, the pastor had an unusual passion and faith, the messages were totally Bible-based which fostered continual learning, and Something was in the air. This is how it ought to be. There was an unusual faith and expectation which the people of the church possessed. The awe is something intangible. No program, background music, or other artificial means can generate such awe. Picking a peppy song to begin worship with to get people "into it" is not going to create the awe. It is the work of the Spirit reviving His people to sanctified lives and then filling them to worship and serve Him that can do this. Having zeal and preaching the Word is a start, but it is insufficient unless the Spirit fills and moves.

I think that the biggest thing we do as churches which keeps this awe-inspiring encounter away is that we don't make the service first and foremost about God. We don't approach God in fear and trembling. There is something about how we worship that is much too casual for being in the presence of a holy and all-powerful God. Awe is not merely something that we feel. It is a trembling in our spirits before the wonder and majesty of the King of Kings. It is a joy that overwhelms us because the God who is all powerful loved us and died for us. It is all about Him. When we get consumed with God, we must necessarily be purified and overcome with an awe that He would choose to love us. There are times in Scripture where the apostle Paul spontaneously breaks out into doxology, praising God for who He is and what He has done. Such instances of praising always follow an explanation of theology and doctrine. It is worship in spirit and in truth that draws our hearts heavenward toward God. Hearts free from outstanding sin and minds filled with the Word of God are central to encountering the awesomeness of God. How worthy He is of our praise, honor, glory, and thanksgiving. This is what we will sing when we are in heaven. We will be utterly taken by His wonder and glory. It will have nothing to do with us, what we can do for God, or any musical rendition that we can conjure up.

Our focus can get off God in many ways. This can happen when a song leader or worship team talks to the congregation and tells them to try harder, sing louder, move around more, and so on. It happens when the worship leader thanks the congregation for their singing or when they tell them that their singing was particularly good that day. It happens when we applaud after the worship team sings or after a person sings a solo. It happens when the worship leader comments about the nature of choruses and hymns,

giving validity to the one or the other, rather than pointing out how the lyrics call our focus toward God. It happens when we overemphasize the experience of worship and feeling worshipful rather than on concentrating on the words of truth in the songs which testify to the power, majesty, and awe of God. Sadly, many contemporary songs don't draw our attention to God because they are about us. Rather than telling God we want to worship Him, that we will worship Him, or that we are hungry for Him, we ought to go ahead and actually praise Him. We sing an entire song talking about the fact that we need Him when we ought to be praising Him in light of that fact.

Another thing that detracts from the awe is breaking up services with announcements or a time of greeting that is really too short to accomplish much that is of real value anyway. This really draws our attention back to ourselves and to our schedules. We ought to try to get the announcements out of the way before the call to worship or just create an expectation that people must read the bulletin. During the Lord's Supper, if we do not regularly explain what it is for and truly take the time to remember Christ's suffering and sacrificial death, our minds will wander from the awesome encounter with God. When the pastor preaches, if he makes it too casual, often by joke-telling and story-telling for the first fifteen minutes, we will lose our focus on God. We might become enraptured in the story or in the preacher himself, but we will not be enraptured with God. We need God's Word to encounter God. Stories, jokes, gimmicks, props, and vocal inflections will not get the job done. Worship is through truth.

How the pastor approaches the Word of God also will affect our ability to see how awesome God is. If he casually references a verse here or there or reads a passage and then talks only on abstract things hardly related, we will likely fail to encounter God because we have journeyed outside of His Word. We begin putting more emphasis on what the pastor says and how he says it than on what the Word says and how God says it. We must approach God in reverence, awe, and fear. If we could learn to approach Him as such, believing He is such and worshipping as such, then we will likely experience His awe as a corporate body. We are those under authority of One deserving all praise, glory, and honor. When we do anything to put the focus on ourselves, we steal His glory. May it never be, for God will have none of it.