

Date: November 5-6, 2022

Title: 212: *Transcendent*

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 14:1-5 and 20-25

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Let's take a moment and pray together. God, as we gather as Orchard Hill in the Strip District, Butler, Southpointe, the Chapel, Wexford, and online, I pray that you would work in all of our hearts that we would encounter you today. God, we also pray today, as our nation will be headed to the polls next week to cast ballots. God, I pray that you just work in and through that process. God, I acknowledge that I don't fully understand how you work and all that is your plan and the extent of your plan, but God, I pray that you would work in ways that expand what is good, right, true, and beautiful in our country and in the church. And God today as we're here, I pray that you would let my words reflect your word in content, tone, and emphasis. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

We've been in this series working our way through First Corinthians and the last several weeks we've called the series 212 about this boiling point, and the idea that that there's a point in which our spiritual life hits a transformation. And today we're going to talk pointedly about encountering God or transcendence.

So, if you go back in church history, what you see is that all through church history, people have been concerned with the idea of how to connect with God. But there was one particular era of church history that I find interesting, and it's when the New Testament church began to expand. It expanded and was persecuted through the first couple of centuries of its existence, meaning it was at odds with the government and culture.

And then, when Constantine came to power in the three hundreds, he declared peace with the church. If you're a student of history, the Pax Romana is what it was called, the peace of Rome. Peace with the church and with others as well were part of that. It was bigger than just the church but that was part of it.

And during that time, there was a group of people known as the Desert Fathers who believed that the church was compromising with the government in order to have this extension of peace, that the church became complicit with some things that weren't good, true, right, and beautiful in its culture. And so, the Desert Fathers became a monastic community that lived out in the desert, hence the name Desert Fathers, and sought to seek God and encounter God because they felt like they couldn't encounter God any more in their normal kind of life and in the church.

And at one point, according to some of the writings that exist, one of the Desert Fathers, a young one named Abba Lot, came to one of the older fathers. And here's what he said. He said, as far as I can, I say my little office, which was a word for their own devotions and prayers, as far as I can, I say my little office, I fast a little, I pray and I meditate and I live in peace. And as far as I can, I purify my thoughts. What else can I do?

And his question was basically this I've committed myself to being in this monastic life, to encountering God all the time. I pray a little. I fast, I do my best to purify my mind, and yet sometimes it still feels like I don't encounter God. It's a pretty modern question in reality, because my guess is some of us who gather today come and we say, you know what? I have tried to read my Bible, I've tried to pray, I've gone to church, I've worshiped, I've tried to purify my thought life. I've tried to live at peace with people. And yet sometimes God still seems pretty remote.

And here's what the older father, Abba Joseph, said back to him. If you would, you can be all flame. His exhortation there was basically to say, this isn't really about you encountering God through a checklist, but you can encounter the very spirit, the very presence of God if you would. And He doesn't tell exactly how.

But again, this isn't an ancient phenomenon. There's an article in *The Atlantic* just recently that talked about the quest for transcendence. And it was written from a non-Christian perspective, saying that one of the deep quests in our society today among people is this desire to encounter God in some way, shape, or form.

And certainly, you could look at the things that are on TV or streaming on Netflix, movies that are out, and you constantly see these transcendence themes. And so, it leads to this question, and that is, what is a genuine encounter with God entail? How do you know when you encounter God?

Now, some people will answer that question by saying, well, I just know, I just have a sense. I feel warm. I feel a sensation of the divine. And people will have it in different moments. Sometimes you'll have it when singing, sometimes you'll have it when you hear teaching, sometimes you'll maybe have it when you're praying, when you're walking, or when you're experiencing something beautiful. But for some people, their idea is, I just have a sense.

Well, First Corinthians 14 is a chapter that is long and complex, and I'm not going to go into all of the detail of this chapter today. There will be a podcast that'll come out in next week, I think around the 15th in which we'll talk about tongues. We've talked

about it a little bit. Chapter 14 talks a lot about tongues, which is this idea of a person speaking a language that they don't know.

Some would see it as a known language, some as a heavenly language, but we'll talk about that on that podcast. Not that it's not important, but we've talked about it a couple times, but at a minimum, whatever you think that that's about, it's clearly a transcendent act of God. And then there's this idea of prophecy in this passage as well, which is, again, God working in and through people.

But here's what I want you to see about this. And this is in chapter 14, verse 24 and 25. And that is there's a description of what an encounter of God really leads to or is. Here's what it says. "But if an unbeliever or an inquirer comes in while everyone is prophesying, they are convicted of sin and are brought under judgment by all, as the secrets of their hearts are laid bare. So they will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, 'God is really among you!'"

So, what do you have here? First, a genuine encounter with God involves a conviction of sin. And here's why this is important. A lot of times people will read a chapter like this and they'll say, well, a genuine encounter with God is a supernatural experience. And it can be that. But notice that the supernatural experience led to this idea of conviction of sin, of coming to a point where you said God is other, he's transcendent and I'm not. God is good and right and I'm not.

And part of this is where we come to recognize our need for a savior. One of the encounters that happens is when we come to a place where we say, I know that all of my goodness, all of my best efforts are never enough because I have had a real encounter with God. And because I've encountered God, now I know that I can't just simply say my goodness is enough.

But not only that, what we see as well is that there's this sense of being laid bare, the secrets of the heart being laid bare, of having fresh insight into ourselves. When we encounter God, what happens is we move from maybe a series of self-kind of management and ideas of what our lives are like, to saying this is my reality and this is who and what I really am like. Now there's something to being laid bare that we don't always love, but it's part of the real encounter with God.

And then you see that what came next was worship. Now notice again, this was what the text says in choirs or unbelievers. Some versions say outsiders and unbelievers. And so, the idea was that when the church was gathered that it would always be looking outside in terms of how it plans its events.

This is a biblical basis for this because it says that if you all gather and speak in a tongue and people come in from outside, they'll say you're a little crazy. But it says that tongues is a sign for unbelievers. And specifically, it's a sign for unbelieving Israelites or Jewish people. Because what happened in Acts is, it was those people who heard people speaking and saw people speaking in languages they didn't know. And they said, this is God saying that the work of God is for all people, not just for the Israelites.

But here it says, when a person comes in and they encounter God and their secrets are laid bare, they worship and they say, this is really God. And then they say, and God really is among you, which is an outward proclamation or statement about who God is.

William Temple said this. He said, "No one can possess or rather be indwelt by the Spirit of God and keep that spirit to Himself. Where the Spirit is, there is always a flowing forth and where there is not a flowing forth, there is not the spirit." John Stott put it this way, he said, "We must beware of any claim of the fullness of the spirit that does not lead to evangelistic concern and outreach."

And so, what you have here, I believe, in the middle of this chapter that is clearly about the transcendent work of God, is you have a tell of what is really an encounter with God, a conviction of sin, of being laid bare before God, a movement to worship and a movement to exclamation or proclamation.

Now you may say, okay, so you're looking at this chapter that talks about prophecy in tongues. And if you've read the chapter, at the end there's this section that I'm tempted to not even bring up where it says, "Women should remain silent in the churches." But that would be dishonest not to say anything about that. And you're saying so this leads us to talk about really this idea of encountering God. And here's why.

Because throughout this chapter, there's this phrase. And it's a Greek word that's translated a little differently in our English word a few times, so you don't see how frequent it is all the time. But it's this idea of the reason for these things, these encounters with God, these supernatural or these senses of transcendence of God exist is for the building up of the church.

Sometimes it's translated as edify or as strengthen. Here's just a couple examples. Chapter 14, verse three, "But the one who prophesies speaks to people for their

strengthening, encouraging and comfort." Strengthening, there is this idea of being built up. Anyone who speaks in a tongue edifies themselves, but the one who prophesies, edifies the church. Edifies - built up.

Verse five, "I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be edified." Edified - built up. And then you see it again in verse 12, in verse 17, and again a little later, because it says here, verse 12. "So it is with you. Since you are eager for gifts of the Spirit, try to excel in those that build up the church."

And so, here's what he's basically doing, is he's saying, I want you to have an encounter with God that builds up the church. And I want you to think about how what you do when you gather impacts inquirers or outsiders as well.

So, let me just give you three ways to miss an encounter with God because my guess is many of us come here and when we come, we come for different reasons. Some of us come because it's our habit. It's our right and good habit because we've said I'm a follower of Jesus and I want to be in church on a regular basis as part of my spiritual discipline.

Some of us come because it's social. We want to meet people, be with people, maybe with our family, and it's our family tradition. And so, we come, even if it isn't really our thing. But some of us come maybe because we're saying right now, I have a deep desire for something transcendent and I don't know where else to turn.

Here are three ways you can miss this, and here's the first, and that is we can be a resister to the work of God. And here's what I mean. Whatever again, tongues is, prophecy is, in this context, it's clearly God working. Now, I've said that I believe that prophecy is the speaking of the truth of scripture into a particular situation, not just a kind of thought that has nothing to do with Scripture. It's bringing Scripture to bear.

But what some of us actually don't want is we don't want to be convicted of sin, and we don't want to actually have a moment where the secrets of our hearts are laid bare. And one of the reasons we don't want that is because either we're just resistant to anything supernatural, to God shining a light, or there's a sense in our own lives, in which we say, I don't actually want to have to change anything because I like how things are going, and I don't want God to reveal something. And so, we resist the movement of God.

I was in Butler last night at our Year-End Giving event and Strip District Friday night. Great events at those two campuses. But last night when I was in Butler, they did a My Story for how God worked in somebody's life, and the man shared about coming to Orchard Hill the first time, and how he had been basically never around church other than weddings and funerals.

And he had a friend who had invited him and his first encounter was in Wexford. He came on a Saturday night and he said here's what happened to me. He said as I sat there, I felt like all of the room disappeared and the person who was speaking was speaking to me. And it was like God shined a light into my heart. And all of a sudden, I understood things I had never understood. Do you know what that is? That's a conviction of sin and the secrets of the heart being laid bare. And it's a moment of saying, I'm going to worship God. There really is a God.

I had another experience recently in this. My father-in-law was in the hospital recently, and I went up to sit with him. And if you've ever been with somebody in the hospital with those robes on, they don't cover everything. And the nurse came in to do something with him, and he was laid bare.

And here was his reaction, because I'm sitting here, the nurse is here, he's trying to cover up because there's something in us that never wants to be laid bare, even if we know what's good for us, and even if it needs to happen. Now, that's a goofy example of that, but I think it'll stick with you.

But here's what happens spiritually. Some of us just say I do not want God to lay bare what is in my heart. And so, we either resist the idea that God can speak to us, or we simply avoid putting ourselves in a place where we can encounter God like that. So, we can be a resister.

Secondly, we can also be a consumer. And here's where we get this idea of a consumer. You see this idea of building up that is repeated throughout this chapter. And what happens when we're a consumer is we start to say, this experience is about God meeting me. Now, you may say, well, didn't you just say that God meets us and we resist? But what happens when we're a consumer is we come and we demand that things are to our liking.

And if they're not to our liking, then we can't see and can't encounter God because we're so busy consuming that we cannot basically at that moment be open to God revealing himself in unexpected ways to us and working in our lives. And what happens when that's true is that we sit and we say things like, well, I didn't really like the way they did that song. You know, I wish that they had changed the lights. You

know, there's too much smoke with the smoke machine. You know, I didn't love the story or this or that that was told. And all of a sudden it becomes a running critique rather than an openness to an encounter with God.

And when we're a consumer, what happens is we make judgments to say this is worth my time based on an accepted cost versus the benefit. But here's what's true about how God often meets us, especially in a public gathering like this. And that is, often the way God meets us is in ways that we don't expect on a timeline that we don't anticipate.

And here's why I say this. It's a little bit like being at a train station and knowing that your train is going to take off, but no one tells you when. And so, if you leave the train station at any point, the train doesn't take off because the spirit of God works in such a way that there's not like a moment that we can plan and say, play this soft music here, hit all the right notes, and sing this song, and everyone's going to go, the spirit of God.

Because what will happen is some people will say, oh, that was awesome. And other people will say, you know what really moved me today? It was when Chris or Kate stood up here and talked about the blood of Christ, or about how this song meant something to them, or there was a moment in the message that spoke to me.

And sometimes it isn't even in the week, but it's over weeks because we come and go and come and go. But there are these moments when God is unmistakable in worship, public teaching, and community, and if we will put ourselves in a place where that's happening, it'll be like we'll catch the train of God's movement.

Another way to think about this is when my kids were really little, I could choose when and how to make a decision about spending time with them. And then they became teenagers and became mobile. And what happens when kids become mobile is if you're a parent, your way of parenting changes. You can't dictate anymore how it all works.

What you end up doing is you end up sitting around waiting for your kids to come through to have a moment to connect and to talk with them about the things that matter. If you're a younger parent or not a parent, that is reality. Get ready for that. And if you're somebody who's been in that stage, past that stage, you know exactly what I'm talking about.

And here's my point again. And that is, when you're parenting like that, what happens is a lot of your time is spent saying, maybe I'll sit up until they get home tonight so I can hear them tell me about their night. And maybe we'll have a moment where there's some kind of connection around that. And if you miss sitting in those moments, you miss the moment. And if you miss putting yourself in a place where God routinely speaks, then you'll miss that because of being a consumer.

And then here's the third thing, and that is we also find ourselves in many ways being a performer. And this comes into the heart of this chapter because what people were doing is evidently speaking in tongues at times to be seen speaking in tongues, to be thought as spiritual.

And then when you come toward the end of the chapter, there's the section about women remaining silent. Verse 34, let me just read you a section of this. It says, "Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.

Let's close in prayer. As I said, I'm tempted to just ignore this and be like, alright, we're talking about encounters with God. But it would be disingenuous. And here's how I understand this, and I'll just cut right to the chase. And that is, I believe that this was speaking to a specific group of women who were arguing about the meaning of prophecies rather than a blanket injunction to all women for all time.

The reason I believe this is because a few chapters earlier, what the text says is that women prophesied. And it was in the context of the church. And what does prophecy mean? It means that there's a speaking, that is part of saying, here's what the scripture says, here's what it means. And so, on one hand, Paul endorses this idea of women prophesying and praying in church.

And then here he says, to be silent. And so, when you look at the context, it appears that he was speaking to women who were turning the idea of discerning what God was doing into a performance. Because what they were probably doing is they were saying, I don't know if I like what she just said or what he just said. I disagree. And so, he writes and he says, listen, here's what I want you to do. I want you to do this not in the community because you're going to miss what God does.

Now, that doesn't mean that there's not a time to, in essence, say, is this prophecy of God or not? And again, it depends on how you want to use that word. But clearly,

there's a time to say what we just heard is not reflective of the Word of God in content tone, or in emphasis.

And I have argued elsewhere that that's why I don't love the word prophecy because prophecy communicates that it's a definitive word of God. And I'd prefer to say that somebody is speaking forth what scripture says that's indisputable. But what it means to us in a particular moment is something that we can talk about and debate.

But sometimes what people will do is they'll use this as a performance for themselves rather than a way to encounter God. And if what we really want is to have a spiritual temperature that's transformative, what I believe will happen is that we will come together not to say, look at what I bring, but to humbly say God, what do you have for me today?

One of the best prayers that you can pray before you come to a weekend gathering or any gathering of faith is simply to say, God, what do you have for me today? Because when you come like that, what will happen is the train will leave the station more often than when you come saying, what is it that I bring? What is it that they can give to me? Or I'm not sure I want whatever God has today. But when you come with that sense of saying God, what do you have? What happens is we encounter God in different ways.

And if you come back to verses 24 and 25 in this idea of an inquirer or a worshiper, then what you see is this word for inquire in the original language was one that could mean somebody uninformed or somebody who doesn't know.

And what the priority here is saying is that as you come together, you want people to walk away saying what God really is here, that we've encountered God, that there's a sense of his transcendence in this place. And I know that what draws people to any kind of gathering is certainly great music, hopefully, compelling teaching, great facilities, great kids' ministry, community, and sense of shared mission.

But there's something more, there's something that you can do all those things and not have the presence of God or do none of those things well and have the presence of God. And what draws us is a sense of the presence of God. But how do people encounter the presence of God? Notice the everyone, when the secrets are laid bare, there's judgment for all.

And you may say, well, who wants to be in a judgment place? Judgment by all doesn't mean that everyone looks at it but that all that we have is laid bare. And that

that word in the original language, to be laid bare, it was a word that meant to shine forth, to be clear as day, to have a mindset that shows it.

And so, when things are laid bare, what happens is we become less prideful. We become willing to be vulnerable because we say it isn't, my goodness, that commends me to God or to anybody in this room or anybody who's part of this community. What commends me to God is the work of Jesus and nothing but that.

And when that happens, that is the thing that causes people to say, that is where I want to live in a place where people don't think that they have all the answers and judge everyone else, but where everyone comes under the same sense of saying, I need what God has to offer in Jesus Christ. And transcendence, encountering God, brings that about.

I want to take a moment and pray. And as I do, I'm going to just prompt you to pray for a moment. And I don't know if you've encountered God here today, but I'm going to just ask you to give God a moment to lay bare what's in your heart when you pray with me.

God, we know that your word and First Corinthians 14 calls us to do things from love and in an orderly way so that you become evident to those of us who come either as inquirers or unbelievers, those who come as believers. And God, I'm going to ask right now that you shine your light into our lives. And so right now, wherever you are in this room, online, in different locations, would you just ask God to shine a light on any area of your life that is not surrendered to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords?

Is there something you've been holding on to secretly that you haven't wanted to be laid bare, that you've been pretending, doesn't really exist, isn't really a problem? Maybe today is just your day to say God as you bring that to bear, I worship you because I know Jesus has paid for it and God, you really are here.

Or maybe as you recognize what God has shined a light on for you today, you simply have not been willing to give it up. Maybe you just need to say, God, would you convict me of the reality of sin? And that following you in your way really is what brings goodness and beauty and thriving in this world. And where I hang on to things, whether it be anger or lust or unforgiveness or greed or pride, these are things that keep me from the good things that you want in this world for me, and especially in the world to come.

Maybe today as you're here for the first time have begun to say, my goodness is not enough. Maybe this is just your moment to say, God, I know that, my goodness, my resumé doesn't add up. And so, I invite Jesus to be my Savior, my substitute father.

We thank you that Jesus has made it possible that when our sins are laid bare, it's not hopeless, but it's instead a moment of joy, freedom, and release. Because we can come to you knowing of your love for us. And we pray this all in Jesus' name. Amen. Thanks for being here. Have a great week.