

**THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD
EXODUS 33:12-17**

- NEED:** A GREATER MANIFESTATION OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD.
- PROPOSITION:** GOD DOES LIVE IN THE MIDST OF HIS PEOPLE AND MANIFEST HIS PRESENCE TO AND THROUGH HIS PEOPLE
- OBJECTIVE:** TO LEAD GOD'S PEOPLE TO SEEK THE MANIFESTATION OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD AMONG US IN LOVE AND POWER.

INTRODUCTION:

The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that we serve is an invisible God. This means that He is not perceived by our natural senses. As the invisible, eternal God, He can be present among His people with out them being aware that He is present. However, it is within His sovereign domain to manifest His presence from time to time to His people and on behalf of His people.

When we speak of the presence of God we are aware that actually we can never be out of the presence of God. One of the things revealed about God in scripture is that He is omnipresent - this means that He is present everywhere in the universe at any given moment of time. Whether we are aware of it or not, what the Psalmist celebrated in Psalm 139 is surely true. There is no place in this universe from which a human being can escape the presence of God. Wherever you go, God will go with you. When you arrive, God will already be there. The presence of God is an inescapable reality of life.

The conversation that God had with Moses concerning His presence is dealing with something else. When God shared with Moses that He would no longer go with His people on their journey through the wilderness, He did not mean that His presence would not be there. Rather, He means there will be no manifestation of His presence along the way. There will not be any awareness of His presence on the part of His people. He will not be actively working for the blessing and the benefit of His people. In a sense, they will be there in the wilderness on their own.

Moses sensed the seriousness of this at once. He had no desire to venture a step further if the Lord was not going to be with them in a manifest way. He knew their only hope of accomplishing their goal was to have the presence of God with them every step of the way. Do you feel as deeply about this matter as Moses did? How important is it to you that God be with us in a way that He is able to manifest His presence among us? It is this truth that I want us to consider around the theme "the presence of God" tonight. I want us to learn about the presence of God among us from the experience of his faithful servant,

Moses.

I. THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD IS THE DISTINGUISHING MARK OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD.

This is the understanding that Moses had in his conversation with God. In fact, He said to God in that conversation: "How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?" Moses understood that it was the presence

of the eternal God in the midst of His people that set the people of Israel apart from all the other peoples of the earth.

1. It is part of the Covenant Blessing.

When God established a covenant with the people of Israel, He included the manifestation of His presence among them. In the instruction that He gave to Moses concerning the building of the Tabernacle, He said, "Then have them made a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them." In that same revelation that He gave to Moses in a later chapter, He declared, "Then, I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God. They will know that I am the Lord their God, but brought them out of Egypt so I might dwell among them. I am the Lord their God" (Exodus 29:45-46). So, from the very day that God brought them out of Egypt, it had been His covenant and His intention that He would dwell in the midst of His people. They would enjoy the presence of the eternal heavenly God in their midst day by day.

2. It sets us apart from the rest of the world.

The Apostle Paul understood this and made application to the life of the New Testament Church in the Corinthian Letter. "What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said, 'I will live with them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people. Therefore come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing and I will receive you.'" (II Corinthians 6: 16-17) It was that tent dwelling in the midst of the nation of Israel where the presence of God was manifested that set them apart from the other

nations around them. The other nations had idols before which they bowed and offered sacrifices. These idols only represented a God that they talked about. Israel did not have an idol or a representation of God, they had God Himself, the Lord of the Covenant dwelling in their midst.

We no longer have a tent in which God lives - rather we are the tent of the Lord. We are the temples of the Lord in this age. We do not have something among us to represent the presence of the Lord, rather we have the Lord Himself indwelling our hearts and manifesting Himself through us. It is the presence of the eternal God, the risen Lord, in the midst of His people that sets us apart from all the other religious efforts and religious movements that move upon the face of the earth. The presence of the Lord among us is our distinguishing mark.

The significance of this is rather obvious. If there is no manifestation of the presence of God among us, then we are no better than the other entities and social movements around us. The church of Jesus Christ has lost its distinguishing mark if it loses the manifestation of the presence of the Lord among us. This is the reason that Moses was unwilling to take another step toward the land of Canaan without the evident presence of the Lord with Him and His people. Without Him Israel would be nothing. Without Him, we are nothing!

II. THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD CAN BE A MENACE TO THE WAYWARD PEOPLE OF GOD.

This is the reason that God gave to Moses for withdrawing His presence from His people. He said to Moses, "Go up to the land flowing with milk and honey. But I will not go with you, because you are stiff-necked people and I might destroy you on the way." This was a disturbing word to the people of Israel. While they knew that the presence of the Lord might be a threat to some, they also knew that His presence was an absolute essential for the accomplishment of their mission.

1. His presence is a holy presence.

It is this understanding of God that makes His presence a potential menace to His people. It is worth our remembering that the part of the tabernacle in which the presence of God was continually manifest is called, "The Holy of Holies." The part of the tabernacle that was just outside of the "Holy of Holies" was called "The Holy Place." All of the people understood that the God who dwelt in their midst was a holy God. They understood that there were certain dangers that went with having holy God manifest in their midst.

You may remember a little piece of history from that period in the experience of Israel. When they had finally constructed the tabernacle and set it up as a place of worship, an incident happened that impressed itself upon the memory of the people. Aaron and his sons were selected as priests to serve in the tabernacle. They stood before God on behalf of the people and ministered to the people in the name of God. Two of the sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu made a tragic mistake. In a presumptuous move they ventured in to the tabernacle bearing "unauthorized fire before the Lord." We do not know the exact nature of this "unauthorized fire," but we know whatever it was it was offensive to the Lord.

The record reads, "So fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord" (Leviticus 10:2). The people of Israel would never forget it. It was written into the inspired records so they would never forget it. The presence of the Lord is a holy presence and to venture into His presence in an unbecoming way was to put life itself in jeopardy.

We must never forget this. It is appropriate to come before the presence of the Lord always with fear and reverence. Our God is a holy God.

2. His presence places a demand for holiness upon His people.

The book of Leviticus has been called the book of holiness. In one of the summary statements in that book God said to his people, "I am the Lord who brought you out of Egypt to be your God: therefore be holy because I am holy" (Leviticus 11 :45). A whole section of this book of Leviticus is called the "Holiness Code." It spells out in detail how the people of God are to respond to His holy presence among them. It is to affect all of their relationship and all of their conduct day by day. To not do it was to put them in jeopardy.

An example of how far this went is found in the book of Deuteronomy. There God gave instructions concerning the physical hygiene of His people. Listen to this word from the Lord: "Your camp must be holy, so He will not see among you anything indecent and turn away from you" (Deuteronomy 32:14). Actually, this statement comes in the midst of the context in which God gives instructions about where and how His people are to go

to the bathroom. Obviously, no one had bathrooms inside their tents. It was a primitive circumstance in which they lived. God gave specific instruction about locating a place where they could go to the bathroom and how they were to conduct themselves when they went to the bathroom. The reason for this is that the Lord is among them. They must keep the whole camp in a particular manner because the Lord God walks among them, His presence is among them.

This is a truth we must not forget. When the Lord is among us, it places a demand for holiness upon us.

3. His presence can be expressed in judgment.

That is the reason that God gave for not going any further with His people. If they were going to behaved like they had behaved at Mt. Sinai in making a golden calf, and He was among them, then they put everything jeopardy. He is a holy God and is capable of breaking forth upon them in destructive judgment. We have already heard about Abihu and Nadab and what happened to them. We could read in the New Testament about what happened to Ananias and Sapphira, two members of the church at Jerusalem, when they came into the presence of God in an unholy way. They exposed themselves to an untimely death as God judged their unholy behavior.

This is the sobering side of this truth. It is wonderful to have the presence of the Lord among us, but there is a certain liability that goes with it. The Lord who is among us is a holy God so His presence is a holy presence. To have His presence upon us puts upon us

the weight and responsibility of walking in a reverent and holy manner before the Lord.

Every part of our lives is to be done in a holy manner.

III. THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD IS AN ENABLING MINISTRY TO THE PEOPLE OF GOD.

This was the truth that made Moses make his bold appeal before God. It was urgent to him that God be in the midst of His people. He could not imagine going on this kind of venture without the manifest presence of the Lord among them. Can we imagine venturing forth in the responsibilities God has given us without the presence of the Lord?

I hope not!

1. His presence ministers victory over the enemy.

Moses knew that there were enemies to be conquered, battles to be fought, and wars to be endured. God had said to him, "I will send an angel before you and drive out the Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites." For Moses an angel

was not much comfort. This is not "the angel of the Lord," nor the Old Testament manifestation of the presence of the pre-incarnate Messiah. Rather, this is just an ordinary angel. Moses knew that if they were to conquer the enemies that were ahead, they had only one hope - this would be the presence of God with them!

We are in the same situation. We do have battles to fight. The Christian life is not a picnic - it is more like warfare, a battle. To venture forth in the service of the Lord and

will be there in the struggle with you. This is the reason Moses wanted the Lord with him. He knew there would be disappointments and struggles. But he also knew that with the Lord they could overcome. The presence of the Lord is an enabling ministry to the people of God.

You may remember that word that comes toward the close of the letter to the Hebrews, "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, never will I leave you; never will I forsake you. So we can say with confidence, the Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"

There should be a "therefore" in a study like this. Let's set forth a "therefore":

1. Therefore we should prayerfully seek for the manifestation of the presence of the Lord among us. We ought to be like Moses -- content with nothing less than the manifestation of the Lord's presence among us and in our work. If we can be content with less, then we will have less. Moses would not accept anything less from God than the manifestation of God's presence in mercy and faithfulness in their midst.

2. We should joyfully celebrate the presence of the Lord among us.

When it is evident that God is among us, celebrate it! When God demonstrates His power, sing His praises! When God unveils His arm in our midst, announce it with joy. We cannot do less than worshipfully celebrate the present of the Lord in our midst.

God is here - Hallelujah! God is with us! Emmanuel! Let's enjoy and celebrate His presence!