

## **Following The Presence Of God**

by David Lim

“If Your presence does not go with us, do not lead us up from here.” (Ex. 33:15)

At this point in time we are in danger of becoming a generation of believers who have let the pursuit of the presence of God fall under the shadow of personal calling and purpose. We are consumed with recognizing our sinfulness, to find healing, to find our calling, to live fruitful fulfilled service-filled lives, but are satisfied without God leading. Most, I believe, do not even recognize they have left God behind and this is the greater tragedy. The presence of God has not been forgotten entirely, but we are close to forgetting that the believer has always, scripturally and historically, found truth, healing, and calling not through the pursuit of those things themselves, but by seeking first the intimacy of His Presence: the Kingdom of God.

Now when I speak of His Presence, I am not talking about the omnipresent nature of God we believe in through our theology, but the manifest presence we see throughout scripture: God revealed to our senses and understanding as physically being in a place; the presence of God that was revealed in the burning bush, on Mount Sinai, in the tent where Moses met with God, in the person of Jesus, and at Pentecost. The presence we encounter when we meet with God and we feel our heart and soul burning in us.

The danger for us is illustrated in the Exodus, chapter 33. The nation of Israel had wandered the desert waiting for God to lead them into the Promised Land and had fallen into doubting the faithfulness of God to the point of disobedience and idolatry. Moses had once already changed the mind of God from destroying Israel to sparing them when God said to him, “Go up from here [to the Promised Land], you and the people whom you have brought up from the land of Egypt... I will send an angel before you... for I will not go up in your midst, because you are a stubborn and obstinate people and I might destroy you on the way.” How insightful! The will of God done! The grace of God given! The blessing to fulfill their destiny and calling under His protection! But without the presence of God...

I have noticed that many of us have made the assumption that if we are moving forward that this is the indicator that God is with us. After all, how else could we be walking in our calling so successfully? How else could ministry be happening everywhere we go? Or miracles even? But I believe there is a difference between God being for us, and God being with us. God being for us means that because He is faithful to us, He will send us out and will allow us to accomplish what He has called us to do. He will allow the way to be cleared for us, and provide for our needs along the way. But God being with us means Him leading us out of intimate relationship with us. Even after the promise of success in taking the land, of conquering all the people of the land, Moses makes the distinction between God simply sending them, and God being with them when he asks “Is it not by Your going with us that we may be distinguished from all the people who are upon the face of the earth?” It is also this discernment that leads Moses to pray to God, “If I

have found favor in Your sight, let me know Your ways that I may know You, that I may find favor in Your sight, and consider that this nation is Your people,” to which the Lord answers, “My presence will go with you, and give you rest.” What was in this prayer of Moses that changed the heart of God? He didn’t ask directly for God to come with them instead of sending them, so why does God reply in the way He does?

You might already see where I’m going with this, but let’s go back to the middle of Exodus 33, right before we read Moses’ prayer. The narrative stops after God’s judgment on Israel to remark on Moses’ practice of putting a tent up outside of camp where people could go to meet with God. When he himself would go, the pillar of cloud that led them through the wilderness would descend to the door, where God would speak with Moses “face to face, as with a friend.” The significance of this to me is that the author feels a need to establish the intimacy between Moses and God that came from him being in the presence of God, before sharing his prayer and God’s response. It was the foundation of intimacy in Moses’ life that led him to pray for more intimacy, which moved the heart of God to change His mind. I believe the interaction we see here is only one of many throughout the Bible that shows the intimacy with God moving the heart of God and leading to His presence being and going with us. It was intimacy that moved God to change His mind and go with Moses and Israel. It was intimacy that made Moses unwilling to move forward with his life without the presence of God lead and led him to that most significant prayer, “If Your presence does not go with us, do not lead us up from here.

So where does this leave us? We will not be able to accurately discern if we are following the presence of God or have left it behind in the pursuit and fulfillment of our calling without intimacy with God. We cannot find intimacy with God without putting ourselves in His presence: in His word, in prayer, in worship, and spending time with Him with the purpose of intimacy as our burning desire and motivation. We must, before anything, pursue being in the presence of God because it opens the way into intimacy with God. Let me be clear, I don’t mean simply going to church or every worship service or prayer meeting where you feel His presence there, then calling it a day. I mean in the secret and in public, in your thoughts and in your actions, seeking for a constantly renewed revelation and awareness of God in your life. Out of intimacy, we discern the presence of God in all we do, whether or not He is with us. Out of intimacy, the prayer of Moses is natural in everything we do, because everything we do becomes unnatural without the presence of God with us. Our calling because unfulfilled with Him, purpose is purposeless. Out of intimacy, when we follow the presence of God, we will see not only the will of God done, but the Kingdom of God come.