

This message is all about the almighty power of God's presence - and how we can lay hold of that power! Scripture provides endless examples of how the presence of God empowers His children to live for Him. And one of the most powerful of these is found in the life of Moses.

Moses was convinced that without God's presence in his life, it was useless for him to attempt anything. When he spoke face to face with the Lord, he said, *"...If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence."* (EX 33:15). He was saying, "Lord, if your presence is not with me, then I'm not going anywhere. I won't take a single step unless I'm assured you're with me!"

Moses knew it was God's presence in Israel that set the people apart from all other nations. And the same is true of the church of Jesus Christ today. The only thing that sets us apart from non-believers is God's being "with us" - leading us, guiding us, working His will in and through us.

Moses didn't care how other nations received their guidance, formed their strategies, ran their governments or directed their armies. He said, "We operate on one principle alone. The only way for us to be guided or governed, to make war and survive in this wasteland, is to have the presence of God with us!"

"When the Lord's presence is in our midst, no one can harm us. But without Him, we're helpless, reduced to nothing. Let all the nations of this world trust in their mighty armies, their iron chariots, their skilled soldiers, their new weapons. We will trust in the manifest presence of our God!"

# The Power of the Lord's Presence!

Here is how God answered Moses' bold statement: *"...My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest."* (EX 33:14). What an incredible promise! The Hebrew word for "rest" here is "a comfortable, quiet rest." God was saying, "No matter what enemies or trials you face, you'll always be able to find a quiet rest in me!"

Think about this: If a church has the manifest presence of God in its midst, there won't be any hustle or bustle, sweating or striving. The worship meetings won't be hurried along, with three songs, an offering and a short sermon. Instead, there will be a calming peace, a quiet rest - and everyone who walks through the doors will sense it!

Of course, this doesn't mean a church can't experience loud praises or exuberant worship. On the contrary, I believe those things are often the result of a people at rest. A church body that has God's presence in its midst will live, move and worship with a quiet confidence in the Lord at all times.

The same is true for every individual Christian. If you have Jesus' presence in your life, you will experience God's divine order. You'll have a peace and a calm, with no fretting or anxiety, no running to and fro to seek guidance, no sense that the bottom is falling out. You'll live at rest, knowing God has everything under control!

## The Old Testament is Filled With Accounts of the Wonderful Blessings That Came to Those Who Had the Presence of God With Them

Consider these Old Testament examples of the blessing that God's presence brought to the lives of His followers:

- God's presence was so evident in Abraham's life, even the heathen around him recognized the difference between their lives and his: *"...Abimelech... spake unto Abraham, saying, God is with thee in all that thou doest:"* (GEN 21:22). This heathen king was saying, "Abraham, there's something different about you. God guides you, preserves you and blesses you wherever you go!"
- God promised Joshua that no enemy could stand against him when God's presence was with him: *"There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. Be strong and of a good courage..."* (JOS 1:5-6). When God's Spirit is present with us, we can be strong and courageous - because no enemy can harm us!
- God told Gideon, *"...The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valour... Go in this thy might, and*

*thou shalt save Israel...*" (JUD 6:12,14). The phrase "thy might" in this verse refers to the previous verse - that "the Lord is with thee." Do you see what God is saying? "Gideon, there is a might in you that's so powerful, it can save Israel. And that might is my presence!" Scripture reveals Gideon to be a coward - so, why did God call him a "mighty man of valour"? It was because he wanted to prove to Gideon what any person can do when the Lord's presence is with him!

- God warned Jeremiah that the whole nation would turn against him and reject his prophecies. Yet God promised, *"...they shall fight against thee, but they shall not prevail against thee: for I am with thee to save thee and to deliver thee..."* (JER 15:20). God was saying, "It doesn't matter if the whole country turns against you, Jeremiah. All that matters is that my presence is with you. Be confident I'm with you!"
- God told Isaiah of a special promise He makes to those He loves: *"Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God... and I have loved thee... Fear not: for I am with thee..."* (ISA 43:1-5). God was saying, "With my presence abiding with you, you can go through any flood or fire and survive. Yet you won't merely survive. You'll be blessed and favored through it all, because my presence is with you!"

These Old Testament passages aren't just dead-letter stories. They're meant to encourage and exhort us to seek God's presence in our lives. We can thank God for what His presence did for Abraham, Joshua, Gideon, Jeremiah and all of Israel. Yet each of us has a powerful testimony of what God's presence has done for us - guiding our lives, opening doors, moving obstacles, melting hearts, making us fearless.

I have seen this proven true in my life. You may say, "You're just boasting!" No - the fact is, God's presence has been with me in spite of myself!

When we started Times Square Church in New York City ten years ago, the presence of Christ emanated from us in all we did. I remember walking into a famous Broadway producer's office in search of a theater to use as a church. This man's secretaries and staff scoffed at me; their words and attitudes assured me, a lowly minister, I wouldn't be able to get an appointment. In fact, I thought I might even get kicked out. But then the producer came out of his office - and when he saw me, he invited me in!

Over the next several weeks, the producer and I got to know each other. At times he would look across his desk at me and say, "I don't know why I'm spending so much time with you. My schedule is absolutely full." But whenever I walked into his office suite, his secretary pushed me past all other visitors, saying, "Go right in, Reverend - he's waiting for you!"

Eventually, this man sold his flagship theater to us to use for Times Square Church. Even as he was signing the documents of sale, he said, "I don't know why I'm doing this!" It was only God's presence that moved him to sell that building to us. Just a few years after the deal was done, he and his attorneys were begging to buy it back!

I saw God change other people's hearts as well. The man who owned the building next to ours refused to sell it to us as an annex. But over time he became a friend of mine, and eventually he sold us the building. All along, he kept telling me, "Somebody up there is working for you!"

That is the power of the presence of God. And every Christian can testify in the same way: "God's presence with me has done great things!"

### **There is a Condition Attached to Getting and Maintaining the Presence of God in Our Lives**

God attaches a condition to His presence in our lives. This condition is found in 2. Chronicles 15. In

the previous chapter, King Asa had led the armies of Judah to a great victory over Ethiopia's million-man army. Yet Asa testified it was God's presence that had scattered the enemy:

*"And Asa cried unto the LORD his God, and said, LORD, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power: help us, O LORD our God; for we rest on thee, and in thy name we go against this multitude... So the LORD smote the Ethiopians before Asa..."* (2. CHR 14:11-12).

As Asa and his armies led the triumphant procession back to Jerusalem, a prophet named Azariah met them at the city gate with this message from God: *"Hear ye me, Asa... The LORD is with you, while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you. Now for a long season Israel hath been without the true God... But when they in their trouble did turn unto the LORD God of Israel, and sought him, he was found of them."* (2. CHR 15:1-4).

Here is the secret of getting and maintaining the presence of God in your life. The Lord reminded Asa, point blank, with no holds barred: "Asa, don't ever forget how you got this victory. You sought me with all your heart, turning wholly to me, when you were in trouble - and I sent my presence to you. It was my presence that put your enemies to chase!"

Now Azariah was telling Asa, "Do you remember what the kingdom was like before you came to power? Everything was out of kilter, with no law, no guidance, no righteous teaching. Everyone was a law unto himself, doing his own thing!"

This is an accurate picture of many Christian homes today. Everything is out of order, with no authority, peace or rest. Everyone does what he or she pleases. Many such families have become tragic, dysfunctional messes.

Yet it doesn't have to be this way. No Christian home has to remain dysfunctional. God's promises are unchangeable, and His Word pledges, "For the rest of your life - as long as you continue to seek me - I will be with you. Whenever

you cry out to me, I will always be found of you!"

This is not a complicated theology. Simply put, if both husband and wife - or merely either - are seeking the Lord, there is no need for their home to be troubled or "without law." Anyone can have the abiding presence of the Lord, if he or she will simply seek Him for it.

*"...The LORD... will be found of you..."* (2.CHR 15:2). The Hebrew word for "found" here is "matsa," meaning, "his presence coming forth to enable, to bless." In short, this verse tells us, "Seek the Lord with your whole heart, and He will come to you with His presence. Indeed, His presence will be an almighty power that emanates from your life!"

#### **According to the Scriptures, Our Chief Concern is to Keep Seeking God, to Ensure His Presence With Us**

God makes His covenant of grace with every believer. This covenant is embodied in promises such as, *"God has laid on Christ the iniquity of us all."* *"Jesus became a curse for us."* *"He will never leave us nor forsake us."*

Yet God also makes certain, special promises to those who determine to seek Him with all their hearts. One such promise is a covenant of God's presence. However, this covenant is strictly conditional. Scripture makes it clear that if we abide by the rule of this covenant, we will enjoy the incredible blessing of God's presence in our lives. And this doesn't refer only to issues of salvation. It speaks of being such seekers after God that His awesome presence is poured out on us - and it is seen and known by all!

God revealed this covenant of His presence through an unnamed prophet who delivered a message to Eli, the high priest of Israel. At the time, Eli was backslidden. The Lord had been speaking to him, warning him against allowing sin and compromise. But Eli had ignored all of God's words. And now, this unnamed prophet said to Eli, *"...the LORD God of Israel saith, I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now the*

*LORD saith, Be it far from me; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed."* (1.SAM 2:30).

The phrase "lightly esteemed" has to do with God lifting His presence. This doesn't mean a person is damned, but rather that he'll have to walk in the power of his own flesh. God was telling Eli, "I intended to bless your house, to favour you. But you've scorned me, becoming soft on sin and allowing your lusts to push me aside, Now I will take my presence from you!"

Many people come to Christ with a great, initial burst of faith. Yet over time their zeal wears thin, and they begin to neglect the Lord. They lightly esteem His commands and turn back to their old, sinful ways. Yet they still believe God's presence remains with them. No - that is a hoax, a lie, a delusion! The Bible makes it clear: If you forsake Him, He will forsake you!

God's promises never fail. But some - like the covenant of His presence - are absolutely conditional. They require more than merely our cooperation. Of course, God will never abandon us or stop loving us. But if we remain in sin, His presence will not be with us - and our lives will no longer be an instrument of His powerful presence. We will live according to the flesh - striving, floundering, with no power or guidance!

#### **Only When God's Presence Is Upon Us Can We Behold, See and Understand His Glory**

When Israel was in the wilderness, God manifested His presence to them through a cloud. This cloud was a physical manifestation of God's pledge to be with His people. It came down and covered the tabernacle night and day. And it acted as their guide for every undertaking. When the cloud moved, they moved, and when it stayed, they stayed. The people didn't have to hold committee meetings to try to figure out their direction or future. They put their confidence in that visible cloud of God's presence.

Today, that same cloud of His presence hovers over your secret closet of prayer. It waits every day to envelope you in its peace. It will

lead you, empower you and give you peace. And it will give you detailed guidance for your home, work and relationships.

Your secret closet can be anywhere - in the shower, on the bus to your job, during your commute to work. You can shut out everything else and say, "Lord, I've got half an hour right now. I love you, Jesus, and worship you. This is my closet time with you!"

It's a wonderful thing to be shut in with God, developing a consistent prayer life. God promises that as you become a seeking, praying servant, His presence will break forth in your life - closing and opening doors and working His divine order all around you. Yet something even greater than this will happen: God's presence will lead you into a revelation of His glory!

There is a difference between God's presence and His glory. Most Christians know His presence - His great works in their lives - but few know His glory. In Exodus, we're given a glimpse of this difference: *"Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle."* (EX 40:34).

The apostle Paul writes that all believers' bodies are the tabernacle of God: *"Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?"* (1.COR 3:16). Like the Israelites who lived under the cloud of God's presence, we're constantly under the covering of God's grace. Yet, what is the difference between beholding God's presence and beholding His glory?

#### **The Lord Gave Moses a Revelation of His Glory**

Moses sought God for a continual manifestation of His presence: *"...that I may know thee..."* (EX 33:13-14). And God answered him, *"...My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest"* (verse 14).

Moses' request would be quite enough for most believers. We all want the presence of God - leading us, guiding us, empowering us, blessing us. Really, what more could any believer desire? Yet having the assurance of God's presence wasn't enough for

Moses. He knew there was more. And he cried out, *"...I beseech thee, shew me thy glory."* (verse 18).

God did show Moses His glory. But it didn't appear in some luminous cloud or in an earthshaking demonstration of power. No, God expressed His glory in a simple revelation of His nature: *"And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin..."* (EX 34:6-7). God's glory was a revelation of His goodness, mercy, love and compassion!

I've heard many Christians say, "Oh, how the glory of God came down in our church last night! There was such incredible praise, and people were slain by the Spirit." But that isn't proof of a manifestation of God's glory. It has nothing to do with God beyond human emotions. It doesn't include a revelation of who He is!

Some may argue, "But what about the disciples' experience on the Mount of Transfiguration? Wasn't that a manifestation of God's glory? There was an overpowering light and the miraculous appearance of Moses and Elijah."

But God's glory wasn't in Moses or Elijah or in the spectacular light. Rather, His glory was in Jesus: *"...his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light... behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him."* (MATT 17:2-6).

God was saying, "Here is my glory personified - in Christ!" Indeed, Jesus is the fulfillment of all God said he was to Moses - gracious, merciful, longsuffering, abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression of sins. And now the Lord was saying, "Here's a living picture of my glory. It is all embodied in my son!"

I've heard some Christians say, "If only the Lord would give me a vision of the horrors of hell, I

would never forsake Him. I'd live for Jesus every day!" No - that kind of vision never keeps anyone. Only a vision of who Jesus is - of His glory, grace and mercy - will keep us holy. I know a man who was near death and experienced just these kinds of hellish visions. Afterward, he swore he would dedicate his life to Christ. But within weeks that vision died, and he went back to his sinful ways.

God wants to open our eyes to *"...the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,"* (EPH 1:18). He's saying, "All the glory I revealed to Moses is embodied in my Son. And now I have given Him to you as your inheritance. You have a right to know Him in all His glory!" *"In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily."* (COL 2:9).

Why did Moses so desperately seek a vision of God's glory? I believe the reason is found in this verse: *"There I will meet with the children of Israel, and the tabernacle shall be sanctified by my glory."* (EX 29:43). The word "sanctified" here means "made clean." God was saying, in other words: "Moses, as you and the people worship me, I will meet with you and give you my presence. And when I reveal my glory to you, it will cleanse you!"

This is one of the most powerful verses in all of scripture. It offers hope to everyone who struggles with a besetting sin and yearns to be free and clean. God pledges, "Your temple will be made clean by a revelation of my glory. And that revelation is available to you right now - in my Son, Jesus Christ!"

Where can we find this revelation of Christ? We find it only as we come to the scriptures! Paul says that as we allow God's Word to reflect to us an ever-increasing revelation of Jesus, we will be changed from glory to glory: *"We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."* (2.COR 3:18).

This revelation of God's glory will provide keeping power for our

lives: *"...upon all the glory shall be a defence."* (ISA 4:5). In other words, God's glory will keep us clean in our worst hour. Satan may lie to us, "You're defeated! You're a cheat, a liar, an adulterer." But we can answer, "No, devil. I have a high priest - and I'm cleansed by a vision of His glory!"

When God revealed to Moses all these things about his nature, he also gave him the full revelation that he *"...will by no means clear the guilty..."* (EX 34:7). Azariah prophesied to King Asa in his most prosperous hour, "If you despise God's glory - if you excuse your sin and neglect the Lord - He will not cleanse you!" *"...The Lord is with you, while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you."* (2.CHR 15:2).

What God is telling us here is so simple: "Take time to get to know my Son! Search my Word and seek me in your secret closet of prayer. Then, as you abide in my presence, your eyes will begin to open to my glory. It is all revealed in Christ. He is the full revelation of my love, grace, mercy, kindness.

"As you continually reflect on this revelation, it will cleanse and purify you - because you'll become more and more like Jesus. As you see how loving and merciful he is to you, you'll become more loving and merciful to others. And that will be my glory revealed in you!"

Beloved, stop looking for a sign. Stop expecting some force to shake your church building, or for some preacher to lay hands on you and solve all your problems. Seek the Lord alone! His Word makes it clear - you'll either enjoy His continual presence or be lightly esteemed: *"For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him..."* (2.CHR 16:9).

Seek Him with all your heart, and desire His presence in your daily life. Then you will know and experience the incredible glory of God!

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