

If thy presence go not with me

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Preacher: Rev Murdo Alex Macleod

[0 : 00] Let us turn to words you will find in the chapter we read in the book of Exodus chapter 33, verse 15.

Exodus chapter 33, verse 15. And he said unto him, that is, Moses said unto the Lord, if thy presence go not with us, carry us not up hence.

Now you know that Israel were camped in the area of Mount Sinai for a period of about a year after they had left Egypt.

And it was on Mount Sinai that the Lord gave Moses the special manifestation of his power and of his glory in the giving of the law.

And while Moses was on the mount, receiving the law, the moral and the ceremonial law, and particularly the law governing the erection of the tabernacle, we know that Israel, under the leadership of Aaron, apostatized.

[1 : 44] And you know the well-known story when they made and worshipped the golden calf. Now the seriousness of that sin is aggravated because of the covenant that the Lord had publicly made with them and they with the Lord prior to Moses' ascension to Mount Sinai.

And they had covenanted to be the special people of God, the people who had been redeemed by God from Egypt.

And after Moses left them to go up to the mount, their only complaint while he was away was this prolonged absence on the mount.

And yet in that relatively short period of time, they sinned grievously against the Lord whom they had promised to obey.

And they broke every single law that the Lord was certainly in the first table of the law that the Lord was giving Moses on their behalf.

[3 : 06] And it's amazing how quickly these people forgot the vows that they had made, forgot their deliverance under God's hand from Egypt, forgot the awe-inspiring presence of God that they had witnessed on Mount Sinai.

It's amazing how quickly they forgot all these things. And yet, the more you and I get to know our own hearts, the less surprising it becomes that people should so quickly forget the vows that they made, and the glory of God that they are witnesses of.

Is it not true of every one of us that we are only too quick to forget these things in our own lives?

Well, the preceding chapter and the one which our text is found, give us some information about the, not just the seriousness of their sin, but the retribution that that sin brought upon them.

When Moses came down from the mount, you know what happened, he broke the tables of stone. And the, when the Lord indicated to them through Moses that he was not prepared to leave them any longer to go up before them with his own presence that he would send an angel rather than said of himself, when this message was communicated to the people, the people repented and sought through Moses the gracious presence of God with them again.

[5 : 02] And we have here in this chapter a picture of this great mediator, this wonderful man of prayer, this great leader of the people, interceding on their behalf and pleading for God's presence to be renewed to them.

And perhaps the words in verse 14 could be read as a question. And the Lord said to Moses, And the Lord Moses answered and said, If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence.

And the request here from Moses is but for an extension of the promise that God had given to himself on behalf of his people. God had promised that he would be with them as he led this people through the wilderness.

And in making the request, Moses identifies himself with the people. If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence.

And what he wanted for himself, he wanted to share with them. Now, I would like very briefly this morning to consider with you the meaning of this word.

[6 : 23] What does Moses mean when he asks for the presence of the Lord? And look secondly at the value that we are to place upon the presence of the Lord and seek thirdly to apply this in some way to our own situation here.

If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence. Now, what do we understand by the presence of the Lord?

Well, you know that generally speaking, we tend to think of the presence of the Lord as that which prevails everywhere. God is simultaneously everywhere.

We speak of the omnipresence of the Lord. That is what we mean by that. God being present everywhere at the same time.

There is no part of this universe in which God is not. The psalmist tells us that he is in the place of the living. That is, he is here in this world.

[7 : 40] God is in the place of the dead. Ascend I heaven, though there art there. There if in hell I lie. And we ought to remember that there is no place where God is not.

God is in the place of the dead. And in one sense, what makes hell the agony that it is, is that God's presence is inescapably there.

There is nothing, as Dr Shedd put it, there is nothing for the lost in hell to look at but God. And they hate what they look at.

And in that sense, the torment of hell emanates from their own being. God is everywhere.

He is present everywhere. That is what we mean by the omnipresence of God. But it means something else in this context.

[8 : 42] When Moses prays, if thy presence go not with us or with me. He isn't thinking of the omnipresence of God because as I said, God is with everybody.

God is everywhere. No matter where you go, you cannot escape from the presence of God. And it's interesting to note, by the way, that much of what causes the disquiet in many a heart today is that try as they might and use whatever means they seek to employ, they cannot get away from the reality of the being of God.

God is. But Moses meant more than that. And the church of God, the people of God, mean more than that by the presence of God.

We've heard a lot of this in the past few days. The word Emmanuel being used over and over and over again. God with us. And it is the presence of God in a special way that Moses thinks of and speaks of here when he uses this word.

It is the presence of God through faith and if you may put it in our own, if we could think of it like this today, God with us in Christ.

[10 : 07] God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself. This world as Robbie Duncan put it is a divinity visited world. God visited this world.

God this world saw the presence of God in Christ when the glory of God was encased in human flesh in human nature.

When he took to himself our nature, God was in this world and people in this world saw God in our nature and heard God in our nature and handled God in our nature and listened to God in our nature.

In a very real sense, those who were living in those days had the presence of God. The tabernacle of God was with men.

God was in this world when he visited it. When he came and our nature at the incarnation during his sufferings and death and resurrection and as he ascended from this world, God was there.

[11 : 21] And in that sense, the church of God today can speak of the presence of God. God in Christ. But that doesn't exhaust the meaning of this word presence with the people of God in the world.

There is in a sense a more wonderful presence and manifestation of God than even that. And it is the presence of God through the Spirit with his people in the world.

And you know how the New Testament speaks of this as the indwelling of the Spirit. Or that great passage and passages in John 14, 15 and 16 when Jesus explained the meaning of the Spirit

coming into the world and the Spirit's presence with his people in the world.

It is necessary for you that I go away. It is expedient for you. Indispensable. And there he illustrated what I said that the presence of God in a more wonderful way were the people of God today than even while the Lord was in this world clothed in human nature.

The presence of God in this wonderful way through the Spirit. If I don't go a ways that the Spirit will not come to you. But if I go he will come. And we know that the coming of the Spirit was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. He came in all his blessed fullness to his church in the world.

[12 : 57] And the spirit of God is with his people in the world to this day. And as someone put it, the Bible uses virtually every possible preposition to express the intimacy of this relationship between spirit and the people of God in the world. God is in us. God is around us. God is underneath us. God is before us.

God is beside us. God is near us. God is upon us. And God is with us. All these prepositions the Bible uses to illustrate the close relationship that exists between the presence of God through the spirit and his people in the world.

And this is why the Bible speaks of God and his presence leading his people, comforting his people, guiding his people, instructing his people, upholding his people, sustaining his people.

and this is the whole thrust of Jesus teaching about the spirit to the disciples that night which was betrayed. When he has come, he will remind you of all things that I have told you.

When he has come, he will show you the things that belong to me and he will glorify me. When he has come, he will comfort you. He will stand beside you in your need.

[14 : 30] And this is the way in which the spirit meets the needs of his people. He reminds them of the words of the Lord. And you know that this is a great part of the spirit's ministry in our own experience, day by day.

The words that you heard yesterday, maybe you think you've forgotten them. But the spirit's function is to, as it were, to reawaken them, to bring them to the surface in your consciousness and reminds you.

And that is why, for example, words, sermons, that people have heard long ago, they thought they had forgotten. And yet there are times when the spirit of God rekindles, as it were, the flame of these words in their hearts.

Don't forget that that is part of the spirit's ministry. When he has come, he will remind you of the things that I have spoken to you.

It is the same with the disciples. When the Jesus, when the spirit came, they remembered. The spirit doesn't have brought before their mind's eye the words that the Lord had spoken to them while he was with them and they couldn't understand them then.

[15 : 41] But they understood them now. They were understanding them now. And is it not the case, see, some people complain about sermons that they hear. I can't follow that and I can't understand that.

Young people particularly. And so, we are instructed that you to make the preaching as simple as possible. Feed people with milk and be as simple as you possibly can, my friend.

Do you not realise this? That part of the Lord's teaching is that some of the teaching that you hear today you may feel as doing you no good.

You can't understand it. Do you know what good is going to do you in years to come? It's been the case with us all. Teach that we couldn't understand as young believers.

But what happened years afterwards when you come to a bit of maturity and understanding? These things come back and that is the spirit's work. That's a point I wanted to make.

[16 : 42] And this is part of the spirit's presence with this church and the world. What a sad world would be for you and for me today if we couldn't go forward into 1986 without the confidence that the spirit of God would fulfil his ministry and experience by reminding us of what we have heard and of what the world and of what the world has been saying to us through the years.

And I wouldn't be mistaken for us some people here today to derive far more benefit from what they heard and from what they are hearing.

I wouldn't be a bit surprised at that. This is part of his presence, part of his ministry as he is present with, as he is present with the people.

And then he shows them how else does he comfort them? How does he stand beside them to help them? By showing them preeminently the glory of Christ he shall receive of mine.

When the word of the Lord gives you fresh insight into the glory of the person of Christ and the glory of his work and the meaning of his work and the necessity of his work, ought not Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into his glory when you see these things with fresh vision in the word of the Lord?

[18 : 04] What's that? But the Spirit's ministry and the Spirit's work he shall receive of mine and show it unto you. And this is the presence that the people of God want.

Again, as you look forward to the unfolding year, what do you want to see more of? Do you not understand Moses' prayer here? Lord, show me thy glory. Show me thy glory. And without his presence you wouldn't see the glory of God. And neither will you and I see the glory of the Lord without the presence of the Spirit. And this is what we need.

The Spirit of the Lord to shed light for us upon the meaning of the world. And the Spirit of the Lord as it were to take away the scales of unbelief and lack of understanding from our eyes that we may behold wondrous things in his law.

That we may see more of the glory of Christ. If thy presence go not with us carry us not up hence and you can say that looking into this year.

[19 : 08] If thy presence go not with me to teach me in thy word to show me the glory of the Savior to show me my need to show me thyself then it will be a bleak outlook indeed for each one of us.

So the presence of the Lord was necessary. In a sense the Lord's presence is always with his people.

There is a sense in which his presence is permanent with the church. He never withdraws his presence from the church. Lord I am with you always even unto the end of the world.

We know that. But you see there is something else here. There is what B.B. Warfield called the realizing sense of his presence with the world with his church and the world.

The comfort of his presence with his church and the world. And you and I would be the first to agree to admit that there are times in life when we do not have the realizing presence sense of his presence.

[20 : 23] When we do not have the comfort of his presence in the world. There are times when the Lord withdraws his presence from his people in the sovereignty of his dealings with them.

And so it is said of them as Isaiah said of the church in his day they were walking in darkness having no light. And yet the Lord was with them and he encouraged them.

to trust in the Lord. There are times when the Lord withdraws his presence from us because of our sins. And who doesn't know these seasons in his life as God said of Israel of old I will go and return to my place till they acknowledge their sins.

Samson knew the awfulness of this. So did Israel of whom we are reading this chapter as they entered into battle that I under the readership of Joshua sin was in the life of the nation and God's presence was withdrawn.

The psalmist said that I regard sin in my heart the Lord will not hear me. There are times when you and I are left to ourselves in this sense and we come to know then the meaning of disillusionment and defeat and weakness.

[21 : 51] Why is that? because like Israel of old we aggravated the Lord and we grieved his presence and the spirit of the Lord is our noble spirit as Paul tells us in the letter to the Ephesians and that is why he uses these words grieve not the Holy Spirit of God.

and you know there are times when the loss of the presence of God is that which proves to you the worth and the value of that presence and just as before I pass on to discuss with you very briefly the value that is placed upon the presence of God let us remind ourselves that there are conditions in a sense there are conditions that God sets before us if we are to have this presence with us in the world as we're journey on we are to see to it that we don't give sin a welcome in our hearts we are to see to it that we don't feed sin in the heart we are to see to it that we humble ourselves under the presence of God we are to see to it that we renounce self and self-righteousness and self-exaltation and self-confidence we are to see to it that we confess our sins mourn over our sins grieve for our sins and as I said that we turn away from our sins these things are necessary if we are to have the presence of God with us as we journey on through the world but in our world what value do we place upon this presence well we need the presence of God for guidance the way ahead of us is unknown to every one of us but not to him and what a privilege it would be today to set out on this new year seeking the guidance of God in our lives we need his presence to protect us you and I are

engaged if we are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ we are engaged in a bitter conflict in this world we are living in a world which is antagonistic to the claims of Christ we carry with us sin which seeks to destroy the work of Christ and that is why we are locked in bitter conflict day by day by day with fears within and fightings without and we need the protecting presence of God we need his guidance thirdly to provide for us along the way we need the sufficiency of his grace you and I are too weak to contend with this world this world is too strong sin is too strong our enemies are too strong for each one of us and for us as it was for Elijah the Lord reminded Elijah of this the way ahead he says it's rough it's difficult impossible on your own arise ever and eat and so it is with you and with me life is far too much for any one of us but then you see the presence of God is pledged there for provision my grace is sufficient for you and my strength is made perfect in weakness and we need the presence of God to comfort us

I ask the presence of God to comfort us when life's difficulties confront us you see there are some people here today who can look back on the past year and who have to exclaim with the psalmist of old lovers and friend hast thou put far from me mine acquaintance into darkness who doesn't taste of the bitterness of sorrow from time to time but yet though the streams fail the fountain abides if thy presence go not with me carry us not up hence the presence of the Lord abides when others leave us and pass away as someone put it if the lamps be extinguished the sun continues if the streams fail we have the fountain remember what the psalmist said in Psalm 94 wasn't it in the multitude of my thoughts let this be my comfort and he was speaking about the abiding presence of the Lord let us then from this day seek the blessing of his presence let us let us believe that he has promised to give us his presence and let us plead this presence before the throne that when I go that someone his presence may lead me that when I sleep his presence may keep me and that when I awake his presence may talk with me you see nothing but his presence would do Moses

God asked him will my presence go with thee will I go before thee and give thee rest and Moses replied without a moment's hesitation Lord is thy presence go not with me don't take us up from here and what if the Lord put in the question to you today at the beginning of this year in your life will my presence go with you do you want my presence with you do you want me to go before you to give you rest can you say with Moses Lord if I don't have that what's the point of going on it was the presence of God that saved Lot from Sodom it was the presence of God that saved Israel from Egypt it was the presence of God said Jacob to his own to Herod to Pharaoh in the presence of Joseph it was the presence of God with him along life's way that had saved himself it was the presence of God that saved

Shadrach Mesach and Abednego in the fiery furnace it was the presence of God that saved Daniel in the lion's den it was the presence of God with the disciples that saved them in the storm on the lake it was the presence of God as we saw last Sabbath night that was a source of comfort and safety to Paul in that tremendous storm in the ship on route to Rome and as I said you and I know nothing of what lies ahead of us but then you see if we were guaranteed the presence of God today then we could face the future with confidence there is a story told of Henry VIII that he was wandering one night in the streets of London in disguise and he was met at the bridge foot by some of the watch and not giving a good account of himself he was carried off by the watch and spent a night in prison and it said that on his liberation he granted a 30 banks of coal and a quantity of bread for the solace of night prisoner and this appointment was made our King the Lord

[30 : 13] Jesus Christ deliberately and by no mistake has gone into the prison with us and thereby knows well how to sympathise and succour he is with his people and all their afflictions he was afflicted and the angel of his presence saved them and this was one of the great teachings of the writer to the Hebrews when he was encouraging these suffering Christians we have a high priest he said with us who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities and the Lord was making the abiding presence of the living Lord with his people in this world and that's the value that they place upon his presence look at the little child in stressful situations a wee child for example going to the doctor going to the dentist why does that child want the mother's presence with her for her comfort and for her consolation and whatever your present situation no matter how deep and complicated your need may be as we sang here this morning his covering feathers surround you how great is the goodness that thou provide us for them that fear thee we need his presence along the way and the assurance that he will then give us rest and even rest as we journey on because there is tremendous rest in knowing the presence of God with his eyes closed rest from anxiety take my yoke upon you and learn of me for I am weak and lowly in heart it's great teaching in the Sermon on the Mount take no salt for the morrow don't be over anxious oh the difficulty of putting that into practice

some people say live by the Sermon on the Mount do you not realise my friend that that is part of life's discipline that you are not to allow cares to invade your mind and to draw you away from resting upon him how often have you found that in the past year in the past years notwithstanding the fact that the teaching is so clear that we have to trust him in all situations how many times have you found yourself obsessed with worry well we need his presence that we may be given rest from anxiety that we may be given rest from perplexity what time my heart is overwhelmed at the Sermon lead me to the rock that is higher than I and his presence that we may have rest in times of sorrow and that we may not write hard things against God and his presence that we may have rest in a dark world with the assurance that when this present world system comes to an end then we will have rest from all the darkness and all the sin that is associated with it you know the way the hymn writer put it when through the deep waters

I cause thee to go the rivers of sorrow shall not overflow for I will be with thee in trouble to bless and sanctify to thee thy deepest distress when through fiery tiles thy path we shall be my grace all sufficient shall be thy supply the flame shall not hurt thee I only design thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine and finally the soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose I will not I will not desert to his foes that soul though all hell should endeavour to shake I'll never no never no never forsake for a joy to have the presence of the Lord with us at the beginning of another year and with what confidence my friend you can stride out into it with the Lord beside you promising not to leave you nor to forsake you until that day dawns when you shall enter into the abiding presence of God where sin shall be no more how do you look forward to this year do you have that assurance at the beginning of it that the Lord is with you what a prayer this is today for pastor and people that thy presence go not with me carry us not up hence oh my friend can we be united in this prayer at least whatever else we may wish for one another for ourselves and for others whatever else we may wish can we pray in the secrecy of our heart even at this very moment oh Lord give each one of us thy presence and go before each one of us with that presence and with that guidance with that protecting power and go before us to open up the way for us and go before us as our saviour to save us and all whom we commit to thee well

I wouldn't want to wish you anything less than this and I know that I couldn't wish you anything more because there is none greater than God and there is nothing greater than his presence may you know it in an ever increasing measure in your own life and in your own home let us pray may the Lord be with us to bless us and to guide us do thou keep us oh Lord in thy fear and bless us each one of us with thy presence we ask these things in Christ's precious name Amen