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Reading: Exodus 33:1-15

## FROM EGYPT TO CANAAN

### 12. THE DIVINE PRESENCE

The Book of Exodus in which we find the journeyings of the Children of Israel falls into three main sections.

*(1) We see Israel in Egypt:* ( Ch 1:1-12:36 )

1875-1445BC (2) Then we watch Israel as they move *From Egypt to Sinai:* ( Ch 12:37-18:27 )

(3) We see *Israel at Sinai* ( Ch 19:1-ch 40 ) Now in this last section of the Book three main subjects are before us. (a) In Ch 19-24 we are confronted with the *law of God*, the ten commandments. (b) In Ch 25-31 and 35-40 the book is taken up with the *Tabernacle* and in (c) Ch 32-34 there is brought before us the idolatry of the people ! Now these subjects interesting as they are do not come within the sphere of our present study. Therefore we bypass them only to mention them as they have a direct bearing upon our present study. As we move into the final chapters of the Book of Exodus we are confronted with many wonderful statements !

Do you recall that tremendous statement that Moses made as he stood in the midst of an idolatrous camp ?

He cried, “ *Who is on the Lord’s side ? let him come unto me ?* ” ( 32:26 ) Then there was that heart felt request that fell from the lips of Moses when he said to the Lord, “ *Show me Thy glory.* ” ( 33:18 ) Here was a man who never lost the desire to know the Lord increasingly and intimately ! Then there was that wonderful statement that was made about Moses when he came down from Mount Sinai. We read “ *behold the skin of his face shone.* ” ( 34:30 ) In other words, the effect of his communion with the Lord was observable for all to see ! However, it is not so much the words that came from Moses, nor the words that were spoken about Moses, but the words that came to Moses from the very lips of God assuring him of the Divine presence with him. How wonderful are the promises of the Bible. No pages in any other literature are lusted with such golden encouragements as we have here. The apostle Peter speaks of them as “ *exceeding great and precious promises,* ” ( 2 Pet 1:4 )

And truly they are exceedingly great and precious .... great both in number and nature, and precious both in the hope they inspire and in their solid reality. Now there is one class of promises which has always had a specially tender appeal to the Lord’s people. It is that large group in which we have the assurance of the Divine presence with us. For if there is one thing more than another which the people of God have always longed to be quite sure about, it is this very thing, the Divine presence, and God has graciously responded in the many assurances given to us in His Word. Henry Bosch, of Radio Bible Class tells us at the age of seven, he was taken to hospital apparently dying from tuberculosis. Despite his constant pain, he found in the

hymns that his parents had taught him. One day, while he was singing these words, “ *If Jesus goes with me, I’ll go anywhere,* ” a lady came to visit him in a wheelchair, taking his hand in hers she began to weep. Years later from his father Henry heard her story. As a Christian she was experiencing constant illness and she become very upset when the Doctor ordered her into hospital. Full of pity she complained, “ *Lord I’ve tried to be faithful to you all my life, now you are making go where I’ll not even have Christian fellowship. I guess it does not pay to serve you.* ” But no sooner had she been brought to her hospital room than she heard little Henry singing,  
“ *its heaven to me, where’re I be, if He is there.* ”

Ashamed of her rebellious attitude toward the Lord she decided to meet the one with the high soprano voice who had brought conviction to her heart. Expecting to meet a mature Christian she was surprised to see a little boy who was so ill that he might not make it through the day. The experience taught her that she could rejoice in every circumstance because the Lord was always with her. Now here is Moses getting this very assurance. Moses did not seek assurance as to route or provisions, he did not ask for map or supplies. One thing alone filled his thoughts, that the Lord’s presence which had been his strength and stay through all the days of march should be with him stay. So he comes to the Lord and says, “ *See thou sayest unto me ....,* ” ( 32:12-13 ) God knew what Moses was after. It was not the presence of angels ( 32:34 33:2 ) but the presence of God Himself for which Moses was pleading and so the Lord said, “ *My presence .... rest.* ” ( 33:14 ) Now this promise is a benediction in itself, but it is when we take it with its context that its fuller glory breaks in upon us. A jewel is beautiful in itself, but its beauty is enhanced by an appropriate setting ! So it is with this wonderful statement, that we want to consider in a three fold way !

### **(1) The SETTING of It ..... In the Life of Moses**

You see, this statement was spoken to Moses in connection with one of the most deplorable incidents in the wilderness journeyings of Israel. The Lord had raised up Moses to bring the people out from the grovelling bondage of Egypt into freedom and blessing in Canaan. He had demonstrated His presence with them by miraculous interventions, preserving, protecting, providing in wonderful ways. Yet now, while Moses is in the mount receiving the commandments, and the instructions regarding the tabernacle the people have “ *turned aside quickly,* ” to idolatry and are dancing, naked before the golden calf. Moses returns to the camp and sees the idol-worship in progress. The tables of the law drop from his trembling hands. He seizes the wretched image, burns it in the fire, and then grinds it to powder ! But if the first sight of Israel’s idolatrous obscenity kindles the anger of Moses, the thought of it afterwards dazes him with grief. A broken-hearted man, he sinks down before the Lord and sobs out the pitiful prayer “ *Oh, this people have sinned a great sin and have made them gods of gold. Yet now if thou wilt forgive their sin .... and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of Thy book which Thou hast written.* ” ( 32:31-32 ) Do you see the position that Moses takes ? He takes the position of the intercessor, one who intercedes on behalf of a sinful nation ! My

..... do we take that position ? Do we know what it is to intercede with God on behalf of others ? Do we know what it is to plead with God on behalf of a sinful nation, on behalf of sinners who are lost ? Or does God have to say to us what He said to His people in Ezekiel's day, "*I sought for a man among them that should stand in the gap before Me for the land but I found none.*" ( Ezekiel 22:30 Ps 106:23 )

Moses prays and God answers ! Do you see what the Lord says ? ( 32:33 ..... 33:3 ) A gracious answer indeed ! Yet to a man like Moses, heart-broken, disillusioned, apprehensive about the future, and yearning more than ever for the assurance of the Divine companionship, such an answer was an answer, and yet no answer. I mean what consolation was there in the words, "*I will send an angel before thee ?*" ( 33:2 )

My .... it was not angels but the presence of God Himself for which Moses was pleading. What was it that the Canaanites should be dispossessed, and Israel gain "*the land flowing with milk and honey,*" if the Lord Himself were not with the people. God's blessings without Himself are not blessings at all to the hungry heart. Many years ago in England one of the old time Kings was displeased with the City Fathers, and so he threatened to remove the royal court from London to some other place. The Mayor replied, "*As long as he leaves the River Thames we will do very well.*" But how different it is with the believer and his God. All the blessings of Canaan are no compensation for the absence of the Divine Companionship ! Is this not God's people have always felt ? Is this not how Moses felt ? "*If Thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence ?*"

( 33:14 ) and it was in loving kindness toward his heart stricken servant that the Lord gave this further assurance, "*My presence shall go with thee .....*," so we see clearly that this promise was spoken to,

#### **(a) A DISAPPOINTED MAN:**

A man into whose life had come a disheartening disillusionment. You see, the people on whom such high hopes were set had proved faithless. The tables of the law lay in fragments below the mount. ( 32:19 ) The wrath of God burned against these stiff-necked idolaters.

( 32:10-11 ) Poor Moses ! His disappointment was great. Yet it was to this man, and at this time, that the comforting word was given, "*My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.*" Am I speaking to some disappointed Christian ? You started out with godly intentions, high hopes, but experience has brought disillusionment, and now you are disappointed with life. There is an incurable, dull ache in your heart about the way things have transpired ! Perhaps you're disappointed with life, yourself, other Christians.

My .... this promise is specifically for you. "*My presence shall go with thee and I will give thee rest.*" You see, the Lord delights to dwell with the disappointed, that their sense of disappointment may be swallowed up in the compensation of His friendship. The Lord is with you, and wanting to become so real to you that your disappointment shall be transformed into triumph by His realised presence ! (a)

**(b) A DISCOURAGED MAN:**

A man whose great work for the Lord seemed to be falling to pieces. How deeply discouraged Moses must have been. Not only have the people proved utterly undependable and perverted ( 32:25 ) and three thousand Israelites fallen by sword ( 32:28 ) and the *tabernacle*, been removed from the corrupted camp, but the Lord Himself has indicated the withdrawal of His personal presence from the people ! ( 33:3 ) Its true that God said an angel shall lead the host, but an angel's presence without God Himself means mere guidance without fellowship ! Discouraged and dispirited Moses comes before the Lord and says, “ *See thou sayest unto me, bring up this people .....* ” ( 33:12-13 ) Are you a discouraged servant this .... ? Tell me, why those falling tears ? Have you been jealous for the honour of your Lord, and it has seemed to bring nothing but misunderstanding ? Have you been faithfully witnessing for your Saviour, yet you have seen no souls coming to Him ? Have you been earnestly seeking to win those children for Christ, yet they seem unresponsive ? Have you been seeking for a deeper spiritual life, but somehow it has not come and depression has taken you ? Discouraged child of God, this promise is specifically for you, “ *My presence shall .... rest.* ” The Lord is really with you, and He wants to make His presence a “ *living bright reality,* ” in your life. You see, its in the realization of His presence, that there lies the secret of unfailing courage.

Years ago, Robert Bruce, a godly Scottish minister attracted many people to his church. On one occasion an Earl drove a good distance to one of the services, and getting impatient for the service to commence, he asked the steward when the minister would appear. The officer went to the vestry door, but hearing conversation within, he refrained from knocking, and then returned to the Earl saying, “ *He won't today your lordship, for I heard him say to Someone that he cannot go without Him, and through he kept on asking, I did not hear the Other answer him at all.* Thank God, we have the assurance that the “ **Other,** ” One is always with us, but what a difference it will make, if we travel on in the conscious realisation of His presence. (a)  
(b)

**(c) A DIFFIDENT MAN:**

A man bending beneath the weight of a great responsibility, feeling that his burden was more than he could bear, and apprehensive about the future. My .... Did ever a man carry a heavier burden than Moses ? Responsible for two and a half million people. Under God to “ *bring them out and bring them in.* ” Is it therefore surprising that above everything else Moses longed for the personal presence of God Himself ? ( 33:12 ) You see, when God calls a man out for “ **special service,** ” there is always a sense of responsibility plus a sense of loneliness. The true servant of the Lord will tread a path where others cannot accompany him, and this has made him long for the Lord's own presence with them. And has God ever failed us ? To those this .... who bear heavy burdens, and are lonely because of their attachment to the Lord Jesus, this promise comes with heavenly cheer, “ *My*

*presence shall go with thee and I will give thee rest.”*

*“ Yea, I am with thee, when there falls no shadow  
Across the golden glory of the day  
And I am with thee when the storm clouds gather  
Dimming the brightness of the onward way  
In days of loss, and loneliness and sorrow  
Of care and weariness and fretting pain  
In days of weakness and of deep depression  
Of futile effort when thy life seems vain  
When youth has fled, and death has put far from thee  
Lover and Friend who made the journey sweet*

*When age has come with slowly failing powers  
And the dark valley waits thy faltering feet  
When courage fails thee for the unknown future  
And the hearts sinks beneath its weight of fears  
Still I am with thee, strength and rest and comfort  
Thy counsellor through all earth’s changing years  
Whatever goes, whatever stays  
My presence shall be with thee all the days.”*

## **(2) The WORDING of It .... As it Came From God**

That the Lord did relate this promise to Moses in spoken words is made clear from ( 33:14 ) “ *And He said,*” What did He say ? “ *My presence .....*” Hear again John Wesley’s death bed exultation, “ *The best of all is God is with us.*” Now the wording of this promise assures us of,

### **(a) CERTAIN COMPANIONSHIP:**

“ *My presence shall .....*” You see, the Divine assurances are never weakened by any suggestion of faltering-ness. When God says, “ *My presence shall go with thee,*” He means that without any perhaps or peradventure He will be with each of us right through to the end.

*“ The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose  
He will not, He will not desert to its foes  
That soul, though all hell should endeavour to shake  
He’ll never, no never, no never forsake.”*

### **(b) CLOSE COMPANIONSHIP:**

Did you notice the first word in the promise is that precious pronoun “ *my,*” and it is this

pronoun which has the emphasis here. God's promise to send an angel far from satisfied Moses. ( 33:2 ) But now at length He tenderly yields to His servants moving entreaty and says, "*My presence shall go with thee.*" The Septuagint, recognising the emphasis on the pronoun here, translates it, "*I Myself will go with thee.*" That priceless "**my**," pledges to us the side by side, step by step, heart to heart fellowship of God Himself through all our way. "*My presence shall go with thee,*" I tell you, this meant more than infallible superintendence from a distance heaven. It meant the close companionship of One who was enough to meet all Moses' need for guidance, and sustenance, and strength. An unchanging, undeparting Friend should company with Him, through all the wilderness journeying, a wonderful Friend who would sit with him in the tent, stand with him in the council, and go forth with him to the field of battle. How then can we be lonely ? How can we experience a sense of loneliness, for this everlasting Friend has promised to travel with us down the desert road. "*My presence,*" literally translated, "*My face shall go with thee.*" Was that not a beautiful antidote to Moses' gloomy anxiety ? There can be no darkness in that life where regular communion with the Lord, keeps the soul bathed in the glory light of the Divine smile. You know, that when someone turns their face on us, it indicates disapproval.

Do you see what God is doing here, when He says, "*My face shall go with thee,*" He is indicating His gracious favour ! Think of it ! The face of God, His smile, His favour, His company, as together we travel down the path of life. (a) (b)

### (c) **CALM COMPANIONSHIP:**

"*My presence shall go with thee and I will give thee rest,*" Hanley Moule says, "*there are two possible sorts of rest. One is rest after toil, the lying down of the weary at the end of the march. The other is rest in toil, the internal and deep repose and liberty of a spirit which has found a hidden refuge and retreat, while the march, the battle, the climb are still in full course.*" In other words, there is a rest after toil, and there is a rest in toil. Was it not this latter kind of rest that was promised to Moses ? **Not rest after, but rest in !** Is this not the kind of rest that we need ? For what restlessness there is today. What hurry and strain, what unsettledness and tension. Is it not so easy for us as believers to become agitated, nervous and anxious ? How we need that soothing inner quiet that God promises here. You see, the rest grows out of the presence. The consciousness of God's presence gives to the heart a rest, peace, stillness that nothing else can give. It gives rest **from Doubt:** for when God is real doubt dies. It gives rest **from Fear:** for "*if God be for us .... against us.*" ( Rom 8:31 ) It gives rest **from Anxiety:** for if the Lord walks with us nothing can really harm us, it gives rest from Misgiving about **the Future:** for "*we know that all things .... God.*" ( Rom 8:28 ) "*My presence shall go with thee and I will give thee rest.*" My .... do you know this rest ? Do you need this rest ?

### (3) **The PROVING of It: In our Own Experience**

Can we doubt for one moment that Moses did not put this promise to the test ? Undoubtedly he

would have proved it and discovered that what God had promised He was able to perform. ( Rom 4:21 ) My .... will God also not fulfil this promise in our lives ? We need to take this promise and prove it,

**(a) IN TIMES OF ADVERSITY:**

Do you recall those adverse circumstances that Jacob found himself in ? What a dark day when he was compelled to leave his home, his aged parents, on account of his brothers anger. ( Gen 27:41 ) But God met him at Bethel, and from the top of that ladder gave him the promise of His presence. “ *And behold I am with thee and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest.* ” ( Gen 28:15 ) Did the psalmist not prove this promise ? For surely when he contemplated “ *the valley of the shadow,* ” he must have recoiled ! But bless God, he came to the place where he could say, “ *Yea though I walk ... for Thou art with me.* ” ( Ps 23:4 ) Is this not what the three Hebrew children found ? Because of their faithfulness to the Lord they were cast into the fiery furnace. You see, they would not bow, they would not budge, and they would not burn, for they were not alone in the fire, the Lord was with them. ( Dan 3:24-25 )

What a comfort the presence of God was to Paul as he stood trial before Nero ? As he looked around that court room he could see no friendly face. He says, “ *At my first defence no man stood with me .... notwithstanding the Lord stood with me and strengthened me.* ” ( 2 Tim 4:16-17 ) When Henry Francis Lyte found there was no hope of recovery from consumption he went into his study and looked death straight in the face and wrote these words,

***“ I fear no foe with Thee at hand to bless***

***Ills have no weight and tears no bitterness***

***Where is death’s sting ? Where grave thy victory ?***

***I triumph still if Thou abide with me.”***

My .... do you find yourself in adverse circumstances ?

Like the three Hebrew children, do you feel the fierceness of the fire ? Like Paul, do you feel the forgetfulness of friends ? Will you put this promise to the test ? “ *The Lord Himself is with you.* ” (a)

**(b) IN TIMES OF ANIMOSITY:**

Is this not what Israel found ? The Egyptians were behind them, the sea was before them, the mountains were around them, but the enemy could not touch them. Why ? Because the “ *angel of God,* ” the presence of God stood between Israel and Pharaoh ! ( 14:19-20 ) My .... do we not need His protecting presence every day ? Indeed every hour we need the protecting presence of our God and Saviour !

***“ I need Thy presence every passing hour,***

*What but Thy grace can foil the tempter's power  
Who like Thyself my guide and stay can be  
Through cloud and sunshine, O abide with me."*

**(c) IN TIMES OF ACTIVITY:**

Whatever we find ourselves doing whether worshipping, testifying, contending for the faith it will make all the difference in the world if we realise that our dear Lord, is really with us. In 1896 Glasgow University conferred on Dr. David Livingstone the degree of Doctor of Laws. As Dr. Livingstone rose to speak he was received in respectful silence. He was gaunt, haggard, as a result of his hardships in tropical Africa. His left arm crushed by a lion, was hanging helplessly at his side. He announced his resolve to return to Africa and then he added, "Would you like me to tell you what supported me through all these years of exile among a people whose language I could not understand, and whose attitude toward me was always uncertain and often hostile. It was this, "Lo I am with you always even unto the end of the earth." On these words I staked everything and they never failed." In that ministry you're seeking to exercise for the Lord, will you take this promise with you, "My presence shall go with thee and I will give thee rest."

Did you ever think of what the presence of God does ?

1. God's Presence Protects us in the Moment of Danger:

Is this not what Joseph needed in the moment of temptation ? When he was confronted by lustful looks, sensual sayings, daily distractions, and atrocious advances ? How was he able to withstand ? Well, he ran and he knew God's protection, for time and again we read "and the Lord was with Joseph." ( 39:2 ) 1.

2. God's Presence Guides us in the Moment of Doubt:

Is this not what Israel discovered ? "And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them the way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light to go by day and night." ( Exod 13:21 ) 2.

3. God's Presence Sustains us in the Moment of Difficulty:

"For 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 shall not be burned neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." ( Is 43:2 )

4. God's Presence Comforts us in the Moment of Death:

For we will not to cross Jordan alone. ( Ps 23:4 )

5. God's Presence Aids us in the Moment of Distress:

For it was at such a moment that the Lord said to Moses,

*“ My presence shall go .... and I will give thee rest. ”*

Rest now and rest then when we have reached the end of the journey !

The Divine Presence ! (1) (2) (3) What a wonderful promise. God's presence for the present, and God's rest for the future. What more can we want ? He with us now, we with Him then.

*“ All that remains for me  
Is but to love and sing  
And wait until the angels come  
To bear me to the King. ”*

*“ My presence shall go with thee and I will give thee rest. ”*