
The Power of the Lord's Presence — A Message of Hope in These Perilous Times

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March 2, 2009 This message is about the almighty power of God's presence and how his children can lay hold of that power. Scripture provides endless examples of how the presence of the Lord empowers his people to live for him. One of the most powerful examples is 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 stated boldly, "If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence" (Exodus 33:15). He was saying, "Lord, if you're not with us, we're not going to make it. We won't take a single step unless we are assured of your presence."

Moses knew it was God's presence among them that set them apart from all other nations. The same is true of God's people today. The only thing that sets us apart from nonbelievers is God's presence "with us," leading us, guiding us, working his will in and through us. His presence drives out fear and confusion.

Moses' attitude was, "We operate on one principle alone. The only way for us to be guided or governed, to do battle and survive in these times, is to have God's presence with us. When his presence is in our midst no one can destroy us. But without him we are helpless, reduced to nothing. Let all the nations of the world trust in their mighty armies, iron chariots and skilled soldiers. We will trust in the manifest presence of the Lord."

God answered Moses' bold statement: "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest" (33:14). The Hebrew word for "rest" here means "a comfortable, peaceful confidence." God was saying, "No matter what battles or trials you face, you will always be able to find a quiet rest and confidence in me."

The Old Testament is filled with accounts of the wonderful blessings that came to those who had God's presence with them. Consider the following examples:

- 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" (Genesis 21:22). This heathen king said, "There's something different about you, Abraham. God is with you wherever you go."

- God promised Joshua that no enemy could stand against him when his 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" (Joshua 1:5-6). When God's Spirit is present with us, we can be strong and courageous because we trust his promise to go with us in all our ways.

- God told Gideon, "The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour ... Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel" (Judges 6:12, 14). The phrase "thy might" refers to the previous verse: "The Lord is with thee." God is saying, "Gideon, there is a might in you so powerful it can save Israel. That

might is my *presence*." Although Gideon considered himself a coward, God calls him a "mighty man of valor." Why? The Lord wanted to prove what any person can do when his presence is with him.

- 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*" (Isaiah 43:1-5, my italics). With God's presence abiding in you, you can go through any fire, and you won't just survive but will be kept and protected through it all.

These Old Testament accounts aren't just dead-letter stories. They're meant to encourage us to trust God for his presence in our own lives. Like Abraham, Joshua and the others, we also have a powerful testimony of what God's presence has done for us: guiding our steps, opening doors, moving obstacles, lifting cares and fears.

God attaches a condition to having his presence in our lives. Consider King Asa. This man led God's people to a miraculous victory over Ethiopia's million-man army. Afterward he testified it was God's presence that had scattered the enemy: "Asa cried...Lord, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power: help us...for we rest on thee, and in thy name we go against this multitude... So the Lord smote the Ethiopians before Asa" (2 Chronicles 14:11-12).

As Asa led his triumphant army back to Jerusalem, the prophet Azariah met him at the city gate with this message: "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" (15:2-4).

Here is the secret of getting and maintaining the presence of God in your life. The Lord reminded Asa in no uncertain terms: "Asa, don't ever forget how you got this victory. When you were in trouble, you sought me with all your heart and I sent my presence to you. Remember, *it was my presence that brought you victory.*"

When God's presence is missing, everything is out of kilter, with no law, guidance or righteous teaching. Everyone becomes a law unto himself, doing his own thing. What a picture this is of many Christian homes today: everything out of order, with no peace or rest, everyone doing what he or she pleases. The Lord in his mercy grieves over such disorder.

Yet it doesn't have to be that way. God's promises are unchangeable, and his Word pledges, "For the rest of your life, if you will continue to seek me I will be with you. When you cry out I will be found of you."

This isn't some complicated theology. Anyone can have the abiding presence of God if he or she will simply call out in faith. We are promised, "The Lord...will be found of you" (15:2). The Hebrew word for "found" here means "his presence coming forth to enable, to bless." In other words: "Reach out to the Lord with your whole heart, and he will manifest his presence. It will be an almighty power

enabling you to be steadfast and fearless.”

Only when God’s presence is upon us can we behold and comprehend his glory. When the Israelites were 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 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 never had to try to figure out their direction or future. They put all their confidence in that visible cloud of the Lord’s presence.

Today, the cloud of God’s 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 keep you in God’s rest, giving you guidance for your home, work and relationships. And you can commune with the Lord anywhere, whether on the bus to your job or during your commute to work. You can shut out everything else and say, “Lord, I’ve got half an hour right now, and I want to talk with you.” This is your “closet time” with him.

It is a wonderful thing to take quality time with the Lord, building a consistent intimacy. The Lord promises that as you seek more intimacy his presence will break forth in your life, working his divine order all around you. Yet something even greater than this will happen: *The continual pursuit of God’s presence will lead you into a revelation of Christ’s glory.*

Moses sought God for a continual manifestation of the Lord’s presence “that I may know thee” (Exodus 33:13). Here is how God answered his servant: “My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest” (33:14).

Moses’ request here would be enough for most Christians. Who among us doesn’t want God’s promised peace and rest? What more could anyone desire? Yet having the assurance of God’s presence wasn’t enough for Moses. He knew there was more, and he cried, “I beseech thee, shew me thy glory” (33:18).

God did show Moses his glory. The Lord’s glory didn’t appear in some luminous cloud or an earthshaking demonstration of power. Instead, God expressed his glory in a simple revelation of his nature: “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” (34:6–7). Do you see? God’s glory was *a revelation of his goodness, mercy, love and compassion.*

Some may argue, “But what about the disciples’ incredible 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.”

In that incredible moment, God’s glory wasn’t in Moses or Elijah or even in the spectacular light. Rather, his radiant 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*” (Matthew 17:2, 5–6, my italics).

Here is God’s glory personified in Christ. Jesus is the revelation of all that God said he was to Moses: gracious, merciful, longsuffering, abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression of sins. At the Mount of Transfiguration God revealed a living

picture of his own glory. *"It is all now embodied in my Son."*

I have heard some Christians say, "If only the Lord would give me a vision of the horrors of hell, I would never forsake him. I would live for Jesus every day." Yet such a 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 this kind of hellish vision. Afterward, he swore he would dedicate his life to Christ. But within weeks that frightening vision died, and he went back to his sinful ways.

Beloved, God wants to open our eyes to "the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints" (Ephesians 1:18). This means, simply, that all the glory revealed to Moses is embodied in God's Son. And now Christ has been given to us as our inheritance. "In Christ Jesus, our Lord, dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Colossians 2:9, my paraphrase).

You may wonder why Moses so desperately sought a vision of God's glory. I believe we find the reason in this verse: "There I will meet with the children of Israel, and the tabernacle shall be *sanctified by my glory*" (Exodus 29:43, my italics). The word "sanctified" means "made clean." God was saying, "As you worship me, I will meet with you and give you my presence. And when you are in my presence I will reveal my glory to you. It will lift you above all your circumstances."

So, where can we find this revelation of Christ? We find it only as we come to prayer trusting in God's Word. Paul says as we allow Scripture 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 Corinthians 3:18).

This revelation of Christ's glory will provide a keeping power for our lives: "Upon all the glory *shall be a defense*" (Isaiah 4:5, my italics). In other words, his glory will keep us heavenly minded in our worst hour.

What God is telling us here is to take time to get to know his Son. We are to search the Word and turn daily to prayer. Then, as we abide in his presence, our eyes will begin to open to his glory. It is all revealed in Christ. Jesus is the full revelation of his love, grace, mercy and tender kindness.

As you continually reflect on this revelation and commune with him, you will become more and more like Jesus. And as you see how loving and merciful he is to you, you will trust him more and more to see you through all trials. His Word makes it clear: "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 towards him" (2 Chronicles 16:9). Seek him with all your heart and desire his presence in your daily life. Then you will know and experience his incredible glory.

Here is one final word. **I cannot imagine how unbelievers can know any peace whatsoever in these perilous times without the presence and assurance of Jesus. Fear and anguish now hang over humankind like a black cloud. At a recent gathering of some of the richest men on earth, one speaker said in an agonized tone: "We are all in the worst possible mess. We brought it on ourselves, and we do not know how to get out of it."**

I thank God for the nearness and closeness of Jesus in this awful hour. I am taking all my anxious fears and cares to a quiet place of prayer, where I simply love Jesus. I quietly worship him there, thanking him and committing all my pains, stresses and family cares to

him. I daily sing that old gospel song: “Shut in with God in a secret place, There in his presence beholding his face, Gaining new power to run in the race...I long to be shut in with God.”

Beloved, Jesus is going to walk with you through your troubles. He rejoices over you. You are going to make it, dear overcomer. God love and keep you in his presence.

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