

MY PRESENCE SHALL GO WITH THEE

"And he said, My presence shall go with thee and I will give thee rest." Exodus 33:14.

If there is one thing more than another which the Lord's people have always longed for, it is the assurance of the Divine presence. To this longing God has graciously responded with assurances in His Word. A mere glance at some of His wonderful promises is enough to fill the heart with fresh appreciation, joy and courage.

As a specimen, let us take the great promise which was spoken by the living God to His servant Moses, at a great crisis: "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest."

I. The Setting.

This promise was spoken to Moses in connection with one of the most deplorable incidents in the wilderness journeyings of Israel. God had raised up a deliverer to bring the people out from the groveling bondage of Egypt into national freedom and blessing in Canaan. He had accomplished their emancipation. God had demonstrated His presence with them by miraculous interventions, preserving, protecting and providing in wonderful ways. They were on their way to Canaan, a land of freedom, rest, plenty and happiness. 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.

The act of making and worshiping the golden calf while Moses was communing with God on the holy mount was cause, not only for righteous indignation, but for bitter disappointment and utter dejection. As soon as Moses saw them worshiping an idol, he realized that he had an extremely difficult task to lead these unfaithful, stubborn and rebellious people.

With the keen foresight of a trained leader, disappointed, disillusioned and disheartened Moses dropped the tablets of the Law from his trembling hands, and seized the wretched image, burned it in the fire, and then ground it to powder. The first sight of Israel's idolatrous obscenity kindled the anger of Moses, and the very thought of it afterwards dazed him with grief. The people on whom he had set such high hopes had proved to be faithless. His disappointment must have been great beyond our knowing.

In his dire need and sore distress Moses called upon God. In response God suggested the possibility of Him sending an angel with Moses, lest God might suddenly destroy the people because of their stubbornness and rebellion against him. Moses was reluctant to accept a substitute. He declared that, if God would not accompany him, it would be better for him to relinquish his task and die. He also made it clear that, in the event that God would accompany him, no difficulty would ever baffle him, no danger would ever alarm him, and no obstacle would ever deter him. It was then that God spoke the comforting promise to Moses: "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest." It is not surprising that above all else Moses longed for the assurance of God's presence with him.

Like Moses, all of us have our crises in life. These hours of crisis may come in various areas of life. A crisis may come through some failure. It may be due to

lack of wisdom, or some defect in ourselves. We may not be in the way in which God wants us to go. It may come to us through some desolating disappointment or heartbreaking sorrow. It may come to us, as it did to Moses, through facing a new task. Fresh responsibility is laid upon us, and it demands more wisdom and strength than we possess. Sometimes a crisis comes to us in the realm of health. When one of God's ministers, Henry F. Lyte, found there was not any hope of his recovery from tuberculosis, he went into his study, looked death straight in the face, and sat down to write these brave and beautiful 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."

The greatest crises of life are in the region of the soul. Whatever brings the crisis, it demands that we find deeper resources and a closer fellowship with God.

II. The Statement.

"And he said, My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.

1. This promise was spoken to a disappointed man.

Moses was a man into whose life there had suddenly come a great disappointment. His disappointment became a disheartening disillusionment.

Am I speaking now to some disappointed Christian? Did you start out with good intentions and high hopes, and then experience has brought disappointment, disillusionment, denial, and unexpected turns of frustration, and now you are disappointed with life? Is there an incurable, dull ache in your heart about the way things have transpired? If so, this promise is especially for you. God delights to accompany the disappointed, in order that their sense of disappointment may be swallowed up in the super-abounding compensation of His heart-satisfying and rest-bringing sympathy and friendship. Disconsolate heart, God is with you and wanting to become so real to you that your disappointment shall be transformed into triumph by the recognition of His presence.

2. This promise was spoken to a discouraged man.

Moses was a man whose great work for God seemed to be falling to pieces. How deeply discouraged Moses must have been!

Am I even now speaking to some discouraged Christian? Have you been seeking for fuller spiritual life and victory, but somehow it has not come, and instead a recoil of depression has come over you? Discouraged child of God, this promise is especially for you, "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest." Are you looking to God to fulfil this promise to you, or are you doubting His tenderness and faithfulness? He loves you dearly. He bought you for Himself at the infinite cost of Calvary. He is really with you, and He wants to make His

presence a living and bright reality in your experience. In the realization of His presence lies the secret of unflinching courage.

3. This promise was spoken to a diffident man.

Moses was 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. Did ever a man carry a heavier burden than Moses? Is it surprising that above all else he longed for the assurance of God's presence with him? Going with the sense of responsibility there would likely enough be a sense of loneliness. To all Christians who bear heavy burdens, and to all who are lonely because of their attachment to the Lord Jesus, this promise comes with its heavenly cheer, "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest."

The first word in this precious promise is the pronoun "My." Recognizing the emphasis on the pronoun here, the Septuagint Version translates it, "I Myself." That priceless "My" pledges to us the side-by-side, step-by-step, heart-to-heart fellowship of God Himself through all the way.

"Take from me anything Thou wilt,
But go not Thou away;
And let the storm that does Thy will
Deal with me as it may."

Look at the next word in the promise. "My presence shall go with thee." This meant far more than infallible superintendence from a distant heaven. It meant close companionship of One Who was enough to meet all of Moses' need for guidance and sustenance and strength. All sense of loneliness should be lost in the abiding presence of One Who is at the same time absolutely almighty and infinitely sympathetic.

Translated literally, the text reads, "My face shall go with thee." How richly expressive! It bespeaks intimacy of fellowship. He was to converse face to face and eye to eye with One Who was strong enough to meet all of his demands for guidance and strength. What inspiration this must have meant for Moses! What inspiration it brings to us! Well may the true Christian sing,

"Oh, the pure delight of a single hour
Which before Thy throne I spend,
When I kneel in prayer, and with Thee, my God,
I commune as friend with friend!"

"My face shall go with thee." Besides suggesting close fellowship, this expression speaks of radiance. There can be no darkness in that life where regular communion with God keeps the soul bathed in the glory-light of the Divine smile. "The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee, peace" (Numbers 6:24-26).

"I have seen the face of Jesus
Tell me not of sight beside,
I have seen the face of Jesus
And my soul is satisfied."

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"My face shall go with thee." Here, too, is the thought of the Divine approval and goodwill toward us. The face expresses the heart. Disapproval is often indicated by the turning away of the face. God's promise, "My face shall go with thee," indicates His gracious favor. The Divine favor is ever beaming upon the true Christian through the face of Jesus Christ.

Look at the certainty of the promise. It says, "My presence shall go with thee." God means that beyond a doubt He will be with each of us right through to the end. If God be with us, even death is disarmed of all dread. On his deathbed John Wesley exclaimed, "The best of all is GOD IS WITH US!"

"The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose,
I will not, I will not desert to its foes;
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no, never, no, never forsake!"

What a comfort was God's presence to Paul when he was tried before Nero! About that event Paul said, "At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge; notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me" (II Timothy 4:16-17).

Years ago a Christian missionary, Felix of Nola, was being pursued by a hostile tribe. His strength was almost gone, and seeing a narrow cave he crawled into it, prayed for safety, and committed himself to the care of God. Scarcely had he entered when a spider began to weave a web across the entrance to the cave. Ere long his pursuers came, and were about to enter the cavern when one of them noticed the spider's web, and said: "It is useless to search there, for had he gone in he would surely have broken that web." They hastened in search of him, and the servant of God escaped. God's presence was near and His resources are infinite and He sustains and protects His children.

How real God's presence has been to many others! It is wonderful that the vivid and supporting consciousness of His presence may be known by the most humble Christian. In no sense is this the exclusive portion of a privileged class. It is the joyous privilege of every child of God who really wants the companionship of the Lord.

How comforting is the second clause of the promise! "I will give thee rest." There are two kinds 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, where feeling is calm and disengaged, while the march, the battle and the climb are still in full course. It was this latter kind of rest which was promised to Moses, not rest after but rest in toil. This is the kind of rest that we need. God's presence gives rest from doubts, fears, anxieties, dangers, toils, weariness and afflictions.

God's presence with us is the highest blessing. Nothing else can be compared to it. It enriches all other blessings. It makes earthly blessings truly worth having. They are not the same to us without it as they are with it. Every hour we need the protecting presence of our Lord.

"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."

This wondrous consciousness of God's protecting and rewarding presence is meant for every believer in Christ. It is in no sense the exclusive portion of a privileged class. God does not deal with us in that way. Let us practice the presence of God and then our pathways will be illumined with a Divine light which will burn ever more brightly unto the perfect day of heaven.