

## OUR GRACIOUS GUIDE

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

Another year has passed into the eternal records. Whatever we have done in 1958 is done, and we cannot rewrite the story. The old year is beyond recall, with all of its disappointments, failures, accomplishments and encouragements, and we must abide by the consequences of our living during it.

Another milestone along life's highway has been passed, and time has again opened to us the gates into another year. What may transpire in it is concealed from our present view. We are starting 1959 with anticipations, purposes, plans and projects, but we do not know an aught of fulfillment or realization. We do not know what any day or any year will bring forth. It is quite likely that during this year we shall be introduced to temptations, troubles and trials equal to or greater than any we have yet experienced. Doubtless we shall be the recipients of numerous blessings, opportunities and responsibilities. We do not know what is ahead of us, but God knows. If we will only yield ourselves to Him, He will lead us safely through, regardless of what we shall encounter on the way. He has said, "As thy days, so shall thy strength be."

Notice carefully how that promise runs. It does not say, "As thy life is, or as thy years are, or as thy weeks are, so shall thy strength be." But, it does say, "As thy days, so shall thy strength be." For each day as it comes, God's strength will be given to us, but just for a day at a time. The way to live under any circumstances is just a day at a time. No strength will be given today for tomorrow. God's Word assures us that sufficient strength will be given us for the needs of today, no more than is needed, but no less. God deals with us on the day by day and hour by hour plan.

Listen to this great promise, spoken by the living God to His servant Moses at the time of a great crisis. The lot of Moses at that time was an unenviable one. He was about to quit the familiar ground, his abiding place in exile, the mountain region of Horeb. His path lay through unknown deserts. It would most surely be beset by daring and experienced foes. It was a prospect before which even a soul of heroic mould might dread. Knowing that he was surrounded by enemies and facing tremendous difficulties, we naturally sympathize with Moses in his great anxiety.

It is not easy for us to realize under what strenuous circumstances the conversation between God and Moses took place. Even Moses was disillusioned. He had just come down from the glory of the vision on the mount, and naturally felt a physical reaction. On top of that came terrible disillusionment, for Aaron had let him down badly. The people had demanded a calf to go before them. The sin of the golden calf had darkened the whole scene, and Moses was looking forward to the future of his leadership of the unfaithful and restive people with a sinking heart. As a matter of fact, though he did not realize it fully, he did not merely have before him a few difficult weeks or months, but years of toil and care. In his dire need and sore distress he called upon God.

Thinking of the unknown future, he realized that he could not face it except on the one condition that God would go with him and provide the necessary supernatural aid.

Like Moses, all of us have our crises in life. These hours of crisis may come in various regions of life. Sometimes they come to us in the realm of health. But the greatest crises of life are in the region of the soul. The crisis may come through some failure. It may be through lack of wisdom, or through some defect in ourselves, that it happened. We may not be in the way where God wants us to go. A crisis may come to us through desolating disappointment or heart-breaking sorrow. It may come to us, as it came to Moses, through facing a new task. Fresh responsibility is laid upon us, and it demands more wisdom and strength than we possess, so we are compelled to seek that which we need from God.

Whatever brings the crisis, its demand is that we must find deeper resources, a closer friendship with God, or remain in some poor and shallow way of life. That was what happened to Moses. He had led his people a considerable distance on their way when he suddenly discovered how tremendous his task was. He found in them depths of childishness and superstition such as he had not realized were there. To lead these people through a desert, and to train them to trust in God with a pure faith constituted a task that appalled Moses. If he was to go on, it was necessary for him to find deeper resources in God. So the burden of his prayer was, "If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence." This hour of spiritual crisis may come in different ways, but its demand is always the same. It is the discovery that without God life is beyond us. Life without God is empty and futile, and sooner or later those who attempt it make this discovery. Nobody should ever live without God.

When we plan to travel in a strange or foreign country, it is a matter of supreme importance that we employ a capable and dependable guide -- one who not only knows the way, but who will also be a delightful companion. Remember that among all the Israelites there was not one man who had ever crossed the great desert or set his foot on the soil of Canaan. There was wisdom as well as caution in the desire of Moses for a guide to lead them safely through the howling wilderness. In talking to God he said, "Show me now thy way." Instead of granting his request, God said, "No! but you will have my presence." "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest."

#### I. Our Gracious Guide Saves.

Isaiah said, "So he was their Saviour. In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them" (63:8-9). You will observe that the prophet did not say anything about the excellence of their character, nor the splendid way in which they fought, nor their noble dedication to their leader. He did say the Lord was their Saviour, and that the angel of His presence saved them. Some think that we should stress Christian ethics rather than vicarious sacrifice. They want to hear more about the duties of men, and less about the graciousness of God. When Christians laid the supreme emphasis on the graciousness of God, they multiplied the fruits of righteousness. I have never heard of a martyr who went to the stake because he hoped thereby to secure salvation for his soul, but I have heard of thousands who laid down their lives as a tribute of gratitude to the One Who saved them by His blood. Salvation does not rest on our achievements, but depends upon Him Who saves.

## II. Our Gracious Guide Sustains.

"My presence shall go with thee." Moses was to have a personal Companion and Partner. He was permitted to hold converse with One Who was strong enough to meet all of his needs for sustenance. There are times when we find ourselves in apparently hopeless dilemmas, and yet in the most unexpected and unlikely ways God provides deliverance. Some years ago a Christian missionary was being pursued by a hostile tribe. His strength was almost gone, and seeing a narrow cave he crawled in there as a last hope and commended himself to the care of God. Scarcely had he entered when a spider began to weave his web across the entrance. An hour later his pursuers came, and were about to search the cavern when one of them noticed the spider's web, and said: "It is useless to enter there, for had he gone in he would surely have broken that web." So they passed on, and the servant of God escaped. I do not know by just what means God will deliver us from the perils of the coming year, but I do know that He will. His resources are infinite and He will sustain and care for us.

## III. Our Gracious Guide Satisfied.

"In thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand are pleasure for evermore." For the person who abides in the presence of the Lord there is fulness of joy now. Christ said, "These things have I spoken unto you that my joy might abide in you, and that your joy might be full" (John 15:11).

This world does not have any power to satisfy. This is not any denial of the existence of pleasure in the ways of the worldling, but they are very unlike the joys of which the Psalmist wrote. It is not possible to be perfectly happy without Christ; neither is it possible to lack joy if we are in true fellowship with Him.

God's presence is the highest blessing. Nothing else can be compared with it. His presence enriches all other blessings. They are not the same to us without it as they are with it. His presence gives rest from the cravings of an unsatisfied spirit, from the distractions amidst uncongenial scenes and associations, from the disquietude which results from want of human sympathy, and from apprehensions regarding the future. He gives rest from worry and the fear of death.

There are two possible sorts of rest. One is rest after toil, the lying down of the weary, at the end of the march or at the end of the labor. 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 or the labor are still in full force. This last type of rest is what is promised in the text. "There remaineth, therefore, a rest for the people of God" applies to the here and now as well as to eternity in heaven. Oh, the glory of the rest that remains for the people of God!

God's presence goes with us not as an applauding spectator, or interested friend, but as Conqueror with us and for us. Others beholding will note that those who walk in His presence live victoriously. The outside world finds out very quickly whether you are living in the presence of God or not. It is truly wonderful to live in the sweet consciousness of the presence of God. Personally, I would not want to face this year upon which we have entered unless

I knew that the presence of God would be with me. God in Christ is with us in reconciliation; He is with us in cooperation and in loving fellowship. If you will make this statement, "If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence," your sincere petition, and are willing to pay the price that it involves, then into your heart will come the promise of our text, "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest."