

GOD'S PRESENCE WITH HIS PEOPLE

"As I was with Moses, so will I be with thee." Joshua 1:5.

The great lawgiver, Moses, had found the task of leading the Israelites from Egypt to the borders of the promised land too much for his strength. Constant rebellions and murmurings had weakened his hands. "They provoked his spirit, so that he spake unadvisedly with his lips", and in consequence he was not permitted to lead them into Canaan.

At the death of Moses the children of Israel were without a leader. Among them was a young man of great promise. His faithfulness and general ability had already distinguished him; Moses had selected him for his successor. Less gifted in some respects than Moses, yet he possessed many sterling qualities necessary in a leader. He was now alone as the head and director of a great people. Joshua had been in the habit of depending on Moses and his leadership. Now that he is gone, God graciously advises Joshua in the way that he must go. He gives him the command, "Arise and go over," and the promise, "I will not fail thee nor forsake thee." Much would depend upon his wisdom and courage. At this time of special need God came unto him and said, "As I was with Moses, so will I be with thee."

In every man's history there are times of special importance; at such times we especially need the presence of God.

I. Note the interest which God takes in men's lives.

God is not an unfeeling, uninterested spectator of human affairs. Every event is closely observed by Him. Joshua had reached an important epoch in his history. It was a time when he needed special help, and God came unto him. God's appearance to Joshua is not an isolated case. He comes to men now. All men have epochs in their lives, such as --

When young, and just starting in life.

When the toil of years is swept away in a moment by disaster.

When loved ones are taken, and hours of loneliness follow.

When there are intense yearnings after a higher and better life.

God often comes when men do not solicit Him. Like the mother who, while attending to the duties of her household, still keeps her eye on the little one at play that she may interpose in time of danger, so God, while controlling the affairs of the universe, watches with concern every individual, that He may succour in times of need.

II. Here God appeals to His past conduct to encourage His servant to trust Him. "As I was with Moses, so will I be with thee." Here was a solid foundation upon which Joshua could rest. We are influenced more by the past conduct of a friend than by his promises. When a promise is made, the mind at once reverts to the past. If he has been true we trust; if insincere, we distrust. Joshua had had frequent opportunities of judging of God's faithfulness to others, especially to Moses. Here was a promise that God would be the same to him. There are degrees of manifested interest, care and love. As special stress is laid upon the way in which God was with Moses, we will notice some of the leading features in His conduct.

1. God was with him continuously from the beginning of his journey to his burial.
Every step God trod.
2. God was with him, notwithstanding a variation of conduct on the part of His servant.
Moses was a most exemplary man, yet twice he gave way to anger.
3. God was with him under circumstances of great provocation.
The children of Israel frequently rebelled.
4. God was with him as a friend of infinite resources.
He was equal to the direst necessity. Once the children of Israel were without food, thrice they were in need of water, and several times they were in danger

from the surrounding tribes. On each occasion God proved Himself adequate to the need.

5. God was with him as an unerring guide.

Circumstances arose which called for the exercise of great wisdom. In no single instance did Moses fail when he followed the directions of God. It is well to have a friend who can deliver out of trouble, but it is better to have one whose wise counsels prevent our getting into difficulties.

6. God was with him to uphold his position against any usurpation on the part of others. Well might Joshua feel strong and courageous.

But to us the evidence is cumulative. Thousands, since the time of Moses, have trusted in God; and He has always proved Himself a never-failing Friend. The promise in the text can only be made by God. Only conditionally can any one else say this. The best friend may change; should he continue faithful, his circumstances may alter, or death remove him from us.

III. The bestowal of the blessings included in this declaration was made dependent upon Joshua's obedience.

In the seventh verse of this chapter Joshua is required to obey God's law, and in the eighth verse the command is renewed. Obedience then was the sole condition. Joshua did obey, and his life was full of blessing received and conferred. God turns away from the disobedient. He who will not keep God's laws cannot have the presence of God with him. If we would have like blessedness, we must render a like service. God's presence is vouchsafed only to those who obey His laws. Do what is true and right, and He will be your Friend, Guide, and Counsellor.