

24. In the presence of God

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As I previously mentioned about my childhood's sports inability, I was a tall skinny dork who didn't know where to fit in. That translated to an easy prey of the school bullies. I have a three years older brother who was brilliant and still brilliant. As a matter of fact, he is a chief neurosurgeon of a top medical center in Seoul, South Korea. Some of you are wondering, "What happened to you?" Well, that is beside the point. Whenever I got picked on, I ran to my brother's classroom. Somehow I felt that my older brother's presence would protect me from the upclose and personal contacts those bullies dished out to me.

As the believers of our Lord Jesus Christ, we, too, have an older Brother who is not only beyond brilliant, but also all powerful over any being in the universe. He is the very One who created the entire universe and by His power and will, everything is held together. If that is not enough for us, the Father God in heaven is our daddy.

Romans 8:17 and if children, then heirs--heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

The scene we are about to get a glimpse is right after a major idol worship shenanigan the Israelites pulled while Moses was away on the Mount Sinai. God allowed the Levites to kill three thousand idolatrous men in one day. That brought rather a rude awakening to these idol worshipping Israelites.

God is telling Moses that He'd had with these people, He will not go with them anymore without destroying them. Again, Moses pleaded to the Lord for mercy on behalf of them. Moses knew that they would be better off staying where they are than going into the Promised Land without the presence of God.

I am praying and hoping that the Lord would speak to all of us about having His presence in every aspect of our lives that we may bring glory to Him.

A. I AM DONE WITH YOU

Exodus 33:1-3 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Depart and go up from here, you and the people whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, 'To your descendants I will give it.' 2 And I will send My Angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanite and the Amorite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite. 3 Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; for I will not go up in your midst, lest I consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people."

After the sin of the golden calf, God did not deny the children of Israel the Promised Land. He did not deny them His protection, because He promised His might on their behalf. But God did say He would deny Israel His presence. Essentially, God said, "I am done with you. If I stay with you, I might wipe you out. But go your way."

God told them they could have the Promised Land, but He would not remain with them in a close, personal way. If they were satisfied with that arrangement, it would prove they only loved God's blessings and not God Himself. If they pleaded with God not only for His blessings, but His presence – it would show a genuine heart for God Himself. This was the first step towards revival in Israel.

My brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus, listen up, please. Even if we have all the blessings that come from God, but if we don't have Him with us, what is the value of them? Heaven is not heaven because it is such a wonderful and beautiful place beyond words, rather it is heaven because our God is there. Hell is not hell because it is such a tormenting and miserable place beyond words, rather it is a hell because our God is not there.

John 15:5-8 I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. 7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. 8 By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

A psalmist declared the same thing about His presence in our lives:

Psalm 84:10 For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God Than dwell in the tents of wickedness.

B. ISRAEL'S REPENTANCE AND MOURNING

Exodus 33:4-6 And when the people heard this bad news, they mourned, and no one put on his ornaments. 5 For the Lord had said to Moses, "Say to the children of Israel, 'You are a stiff-necked people. I could come up into your midst in one moment and consume you. Now therefore, take off your ornaments, that I may know what to do to you.'" 6 So the children of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments by Mount Horeb.

These ornaments, as we have already seen, were heathen. As some of personal ornaments are used to identify individual's religion, these ancient Hebrews had heathen ornaments that were influenced by the Egyptian idol worship. But just because someone is wearing a cross, that doesn't mean that that person is a born-again Christian. Good examples of that would be the MegaDeath band members, Madonna and Elton John. They have nothing to do with worshiping Jesus, but they all wear crucifixes.

When the people heard that God would not go with them, they humbled themselves and mourned. It is one thing to mourn because of God's discipline of our sins and quite something else to mourn because of God's distance resulting from our pride.

C. THE THIRD DISCIPLINE FROM THE LORD

Exodus 33:7-11 Moses took his tent and pitched it outside the camp, far from the camp, and called it the tabernacle of meeting. And it came to pass that everyone who sought the Lord went out to the tabernacle of meeting which was outside the camp. 8 So it was, whenever Moses went out to the tabernacle, that all the people rose, and each man stood at his tent door and watched Moses until he had gone into the tabernacle. 9 And it came to pass, when Moses entered the tabernacle, that the pillar of cloud descended and stood at the door of the tabernacle, and the Lord talked with Moses. 10 All the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the tabernacle door, and all the people rose and worshiped, each man in his tent door. 11 So the Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. And he would return to the camp, but his servant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, did not depart from the tabernacle.

God's first discipline was a mass death. The Levites who were moved by God had killed 3,000 men who were engaged in idolatrous worship and immoral practices.

God's second judgment was to refuse to go before Israel as they marched to the Promised Land.

The third judgment was to move Moses' "tent of meeting" to a site outside the camp, where he would personally meet with God. The other Israelites could no longer have God's presence in the midst of the camp, but watching from the distance. Eventually, God allowed them to set up His tabernacle in the midst of their camp again later time. Our God is ever so forgiving and slow to anger.

Moses took his tent and pitched it outside the camp, far from the camp. Since the tabernacle wasn't built yet, Moses initiated a determined effort to seek God, making his own tent a tabernacle of meeting.

By making the place of worship outside the camp, Moses clearly drew a line to see who really wanted to draw close to the Lord. The people watched and noticed. When Moses worshiped, they also worshiped.

When the Holy Spirit of God begins to deal with any one of us, there will be this separation. It will not be paraded, it will not be the Pharisees' 'I am holier than thou' attitude. Once a man begins to be burdened for the glory of God and the state of the Church, he immediately feels the call to consecration, he 'goes out' of his comfort zone and get into "God zone." Every one of us is as close to God as he has chosen to be.

Many people would come up with just about any excuses not to go churches: "My cat is having a headache. I need to stay home to take care of her," "It looks like it is gonna rain in Seattle. It might move down to here before noon." Here is all time favorite excuse of men: "There is a great college football game on TV." But when God says, "Go without Me," don't complain.

In my opinion, the v11 is one of the most intimate verse in the whole Bible that talks about the relationship between God and man. The opposite one would be for Samson's case:

Judges 16:20 And she said, "The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" So he awoke from his sleep, and said, "I will go out as before, at other times, and shake myself free!" But he did not know that the Lord had departed from him.

D. IF YOU DON'T GO, WE DON'T GO

Exodus 33:12-17 Then Moses said to the Lord, "See, You say to me, 'Bring up this people.' But You have not let me know whom You will send with me. Yet You have said, 'I know you by name, and you have also found grace in My sight.' 13 Now therefore, I pray, if I have found grace in Your sight, show me now Your way, that I may know You and that I may find grace in Your sight. And consider that this nation is Your people." 14 And He said, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." 15 Then he said to Him, "If Your Presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here. 16 For how then will it be known that Your people and I have found grace in Your sight, except You go with us? So we shall be separate, Your people and I, from all the people who are upon the face of the earth." 17 So the Lord said to Moses, "I will

also do this thing that you have spoken; for you have found grace in My sight, and I know you by name."

Moses asked for God's grace to bless the people and God's presence to go with the people, and the Lord granted his request. After all, it was the glorious presence of God that distinguished Israel from all the other nations. Other nations had laws, priests and sacrifices. Only Israel had the presence of God among them.

"How can we spend time in the presence of God, when God is in heaven?" you may ask. Remember, God is omnipresent. It is one thing have the presence of God around the earth atmosphere, but it is a completely different thing to have His presence with us because He is pleased to be with us.

God's presence is not in a breathtaking waterfall, nor a beautiful serene tropical island, nor majestic mountain peaks, rather He is located wherever and whenever we seek Him with all of our hearts.

One of the ways to encounter our God in a special way is attending one of the retreats – the Women's Retreat in next September or the Men's Conference in next November, submerging into His presence through His Word and fellowship with His people for three days.

E. IN THE CLEFT OF ROCK

Exodus 33:18-23 And he said, "Please, show me Your glory." 19 Then He said, "I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." 20 But He said, "You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live." 21 And the Lord said, "Here is a place by Me, and you shall stand on the rock. 22 So it shall be, while My glory passes by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My hand while I pass by. 23 Then I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back; but My face shall not be seen."

The great hymn writer Fanny Crosby wrote a hymn from this portion of the chapter:

A wonderful Savior is Jesus my Lord,
A wonderful Savior to me;
He hideth my soul in the cleft of the rock,
Where rivers of pleasure I see.

He hideth my soul in the cleft of the rock
That shadows a dry, thirsty land;
He hideth my life with the depths of His love,
And covers me there with His hand,
And covers me there with His hand.

This hunger for more of God is a mark of true revival and restoration of relationship. Whatever Moses had experienced with God, he now wanted more.

We may have been Christians for many years, but have we ever really longed for that close relationship with God? Why would any born-again Christian settle for anything less than the most intimate relationship with God? They are cheating themselves because of their own selfishness and shallow immature heart toward God. God is not trying to ruin fun from anyone. Rather He wants to give us far more than anyone of us can possibly imagine.

I got saved in January 1987. I didn't know anything about God nor anything about Christianity for that matter. One day, I was praying and reading the Bible, I was overwhelmed with the unquenching desire to know God. I fell on my face and prayer to Him, "Help me know You more, Lord." No sooner I asked, I literally heard His voice in my heart, "Read My Word." He didn't say, "Go to Dallas Seminary," nor "Attend the Calvary Chapel Bible College," nor "Listen to Pastor Chuck Smith and Pastor Chuck Swindoll's teaching tapes." The Lord pointed me to the Word, the Bible. I knew it was Him beyond the shadow of doubt.

Do you want to know God? Get into His Word daily. I believe every sincere child of God has a desire to know God. It is up to individual Christian to seek Him.

As the believers of Jesus Christ, we have an everlasting assurance of God that He will never leave us, nor forsake us. But the non-believers don't have the same assurance since they are not His children.

F. APPLICATIONS

1) Without His presence in our lives, we are vulnerable to satan's attacks.

Without the Lord, we would be literal sitting ducks to be hunted down by satan. Without God, we are no match for him.

2) Without His presence in our lives, we cannot do anything right.

Don't make a mistake about it. Without God, we would be no different than the worst criminals. The only difference between them and us is that the Holy Spirit shows us what the right things are to do.

3) Without His presence in our lives, we would be forever lost.

I am sure that you've seen a magazine cover that shows the 100 most beautiful people in America. They all are wealthy and good looking and some of them actually have brain. But practically all of them are utterly lost because they don't have Jesus Christ in their hearts.