

Ex. 33:1-16

January 27, 2019

“Presence Required: Don’t Settle”

I’m Kip Hamby, the Director of Upward Sports here at Christ Community, and I am glad for the privilege to serve as the teaching Pastor this morning.

- ♦ **Intro:** We are week four into our new series, “Experience His Presence”. I’m grateful for Pastor David selecting this topic for us. There is nothing more important or essential for us in life than regularly experiencing God’s presence. It is to be the lifeblood and native air of the Christian. And don’t overlook the fact that this fellowship is special to our Father, too. That’s why his Son died and rose again for us, that we could once again enjoy the intimacy of Eden together. He is restoring all things.

Before we begin in our text this morning, I want to read a fun paragraph to you from a book by Andrew Peterson, a gifted author and musician. He has written a series of children’s books that adults actually enjoy more. Kind of like Looney Tunes cartoons—adults tend to understand more of the humor than kids do. And like much good humor, this paragraph also points to an important truth. Enjoy the creative language here...

Holore is an ancient word with several meanings. Its most common definition is “the feeling of forgetting to do something without knowing what that thing is.” For example: Foom was overcome with holore for the whole journey, but when he returned home to find his wife still waiting on the front steps, he realized what he had forgotten. The word holore is also used to describe the scent of burned cookies, and is often applied to any potentially good thing that has turned unexpectedly sour. For example: When Foom realized he had forgotten to bring his wife on a three-day vacation, the holiday was holore.ⁱ

A funny account, except for poor Foom. But the connection for us this morning is less humorous: do we often experience “holore” with our Lord? Do we leave the Holy Spirit on the front steps most of our days, and go on our merry way oblivious to our lack of experiencing Him?

Today we will take a close look at Moses, and examine what he can teach us about experiencing God’s presence. We will be spending our time this morning in Exodus 33, or page 68 in the Bible beneath your seats.... Would you please **pray** with me? *Father, as we open up your Word together this morning, I confess my need right now for your Spirit’s presence and filling. Give each one of us ears to hear what You would say to us this morning. Amen*

Let’s look at **the context** of our passage before we launch in:

- ♦ The children of Israel—Jacob’s descendants--had been oppressed by Egypt for 400 years

- ♦ Moses, after a wildly unsuccessful attempt to free his people in his own power, fled from Egypt for his life and settled quietly in Midian for 40 years.
- ♦ He then encountered Yahweh in the burning bush, where God told him to lead the Israelites out of slavery.
- ♦ God then proceeded to do just that through the Exodus, along the way humbling Pharaoh, Egypt, and their gods.
- ♦ However, Israel quickly proved to be a fickle bride as they began their journey to the promised land. God, however, was merciful and gracious groom and promised to dwell among his people in the tabernacle that He instructed them to build.
- ♦ Finally, in Exodus 32, God's people committed spiritual adultery by turning from the Lord and worshipping the golden calf.
- ♦ In fact, if you listen carefully, Ex. 32 may remind you of Gen. 3. God appeared in Eden in the cool of the day and found our sinful parents hiding among the trees. Love was not in their looks, to quote John Milton in *Paradise Lost*.
- ♦ In Ex. 32, God's representative Moses comes down from the mountain unannounced and finds the LORD's covenant people hiding from Him in idolatry. Love for God was not in their looks, either.

Let me pick up the account in Exodus chapter **33, verses 1-6** **Read**

The first truth I want you to see in the text today is the absolute horror of...

♦ **The loss of God's presence**

- Things start off pretty well it seems in vv. 1 and 2, and the first part of verse 3. The LORD tells Moses that the Israelites will still inherit the promised land, that an angel will guide them and their enemies will be driven out, and that the land will flow with milk and honey. But then the LORD dropped the bombshell: **"but I will not go up among you."** All conversation stopped among the people when they heard Moses pass on these sobering words. They were horror-stricken. The very next verse says, **"When the people heard *this disastrous word*, they mourned."**
- Wow. That's quite a statement. Why would the LORD not going with them be such a "disastrous" word? They were still going to receive God's blessings: His guidance, protection, and provision. Wasn't that enough? No, far from it. To their credit, the sinful Israelites understood that God's manifest presence was essential to their existence, identity, and purpose. Their covenant God had just given to Moses extensive instructions on the building of the Tabernacle, where He would dwell in the midst of his people. Now after committing gross spiritual adultery with the golden calf, God's jealous presence with his people seems to be coming to a sudden end.
- This may seem a bit abrupt to us on this side of the cross and its grace. We get the idea of discipline, but for God to not go with his people? But let's try to put

ourselves in God's shoes, if you will. He has poured himself into the deliverance of his people from Egypt, given them his perfect Law, wed himself to them as their covenant-keeping God. And the first time he leaves for a business trip, so to speak, He comes home to find his bride in bed with another man. And she brazenly looks at him with no remorse. No wonder he wanted to destroy the Israelites in the moment. Only Moses intercession in chapter 32 prevented that from happening. Yahweh leaving them here in chapter 33 actually seems fitting. They had just acted like they didn't want him around anyway.

- How can we **apply** this to our lives today? While I don't believe we can lose the Holy Spirit if we are sons or daughters of God through faith in Christ, we *can* quench the Spirit's flow in our livesⁱⁱ and miss out on the joy and fruit-bearing that He has purposed for us. And let's not for a moment think that the blessings of guidance, protection, and provision will satisfy our hearts. Non-Christians can experience all three of these things through God's common gracesⁱⁱⁱ. We were made for something far greater and lasting: we were made for an intimate relationship with our loving Creator God. Don't settle for milk and honey—don't make them your focus--when God is offering you something infinitely better in Himself. Be desperate for His daily felt presence. When you catch yourself drifting, which we all do, learn the discipline of quickly recollecting yourself, of repenting in the moment, and reengaging your connection with Him. Draw near to Him, and He will draw near to you.^{iv}

Let's continue our reading of this amazing account: read vv. 7-11

We have examined the absolute horror of the loss of God's presence for Israel. Let's now look at the second truth in our text as it pertains to God's presence: we are to...

♦ **Desire God's presence individually** (vv. 7-11)

- In this section we see the curious inclusion of "the tent of meeting". Unlike the tabernacle, which God gave much detailed instruction on--13 chapters in Exodus to be exact--the tent of meeting seems to be something that Moses came up with on his own. God's continuing presence with Israel seemed to have come to an end, but that didn't keep Moses from seeking God individually. The man or woman who loves God's presence will always find a way to meet with Him!
- Unlike the tabernacle, which was to be set up in the middle of God's people, the tent of meeting was pitched outside the camp, far off from the camp. God was no longer going to be in the midst of his people. The Israelites could only watch from a distance.

- But what makes this section gripping is not who came up with the idea of the tent of meeting, or it's physical location. It is Moses conversation with God.
 - We see first of all that the LORD spoke face to face with Moses. This is not to be taken literally, as God is Spirit,^v but it is a reference to closeness. It reminds me of the apostle John's words in 2 Jn. 12: **"Though I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink. Instead I hope to come to you and talk face to face, so that our joy may be complete."** In other words, for the LORD to speak face to face with Moses in the cloud at the entrance of the tent meant that Yahweh desired to be close to Moses, to share his thoughts and feelings with him, and it was mutual, it was for their shared joy.
 - May I diverge on a small tangent? This idea and value of "face time" is getting lost in our culture, isn't it? Face time is quite often being replaced by screen time. Some of you have met Rebekah, our middle daughter, who is the Women's Director at Veritas Church in Iowa City. She shared with me this week that the popularity of social media has diminished her women's felt need for deep friendship; for face-to-face sharing of struggles and joys. Without throwing the baby out with the bathwater, let's as followers of Christ not follow the pattern of the world when it comes to relational connections. Let's make our communication MO one of intimacy, not convenience; honesty and transparency, instead of seeking to put out an ideal image. Like Moses and the LORD, let's connect more and more face to face.
 - We also see that the LORD spoke to Moses **"as a man speaks to his friend."** I know many of you give irrefutable and beautiful testimony to a genuine friendship with God. You regularly seek Him, and He makes your day. In fact, I would venture to say that you often make his. You speak openly with him about your needs and desires; you listen attentively to him through the Scriptures and in all of life, including when he directs you to minister to someone. Thanks for preaching this passage with your lives.
- Did you catch that Moses being in regular conversation with God had an impact on others?
 - First of all, note in verse 10 that the Israelites watching from their tent door rose up and worshiped. I'm not sure exactly what to make of that, as the text doesn't disclose much. But I will say this: when we connect with God, people will take note. They are either watching us directly, like when a young child walks in on a mom or dad's early morning quiet time; or they will see the effects, the afterglow of our times spent alone with our Father.

- Let's also take a look at Joshua—the future leader of Israel. Verse 11 says “[Moses’] assistant Joshua...a young man, would not depart from the tent”. Moses eventually would go back into the camp after meeting with God, but Joshua stayed put. He very possibly listened in on the conversation between Moses and the LORD. And it's certainly possible that the LORD spoke to him as well. Whatever the details, it's safe to assume that Joshua being with his mentor Moses in the very presence of God had to be leadership training like no other. Can you imagine marketing that in today's leadership training environment!“In the Cloud!”
- If you would aspire to be a biblical leader, whether in the home, at work, or at church, there is no substitute for spending quality time alone with God. To hear his voice and gain his perspective from the Scriptures, to openly share your heart with him in prayer; these are essential to the man or woman who would lead others. To not do so is to invite the countless pressures of life and ministry to consume you. Don't settle for watching others meet with God. Insist on meeting with him yourself. We can all have God as a mentor.

Let's continue reading in **verse 12 (read)**

Our passage this morning shows us that God's manifest presence can be grieved if we treat Him with contempt, it informs us by Moses' example that we can meet with Him individually, and it also demonstrates for us that we are to...

- ♦ **Desire God's presence for others** (vv. 12-16) We want them to experience it, too.
 - Moses boldly intercedes for God's people as the LORD's covenant mediator. The crux of our passage this morning is not God saying he will no longer go with his people, even though that raises great tension. Nor is it Moses meeting individually with God, as sweet as that sounds. The heartbeat of our passage today is that Moses fights and intercedes for God's presence to return to His people. He doesn't avoid the tension, quietly hoping it will go away. No, as God's emboldened friend he tackles the tension—he goes after it—in prayer.
 - Let's examine this impassioned prayer. Moses makes his first appeal in prayer by leveraging his relationship with God, and by holding God to his word. Moses said: **Yet you have said, 'I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight.'** Now therefore, if I have found favor in your sight, please show me now your ways, that I may know you in order to find favor in your sight. It's the word “therefore” that indicates that Moses is leaning into God's knowledge of him and favor toward him. In other words, Moses is saying “if I'm indeed special to you, please prove it by granting my request.”
 - Then Moses tips his hand by saying **“Consider too that this nation is your people.”** Moses loves Yahweh, but he also loves God's sin-tainted people.

“Remember God—these people that you have said you are not going up with—you have created them and made them your own.”

- God responds in a most interesting way. At first glance, it's almost like he wasn't listening to Moses: he promises that his presence will go with *him* and that he will give *him* rest. No mention of Israel. No “them”--the pronouns aren't lining up. And also notice the amazing fact that Moses is not the least bit interested in God blessing him if Israel isn't a part of the deal.
- So what is God doing here? Is he a poor listener? Is he apathetic towards a rebellious people? No, not at all. I believe God is testing Moses' leadership: he has witnessed Moses' zeal and keen sense of justice. But how patient, how compassionate is he towards the sinful people he has been called to lead? How badly does he want the LORD to be glorified among these jars of clay?
- So Moses continues: **“If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here.”** He we see that Moses is not easily deterred, he is holding tenaciously to his request that God would take not only him, but all of Israel to the promised land. Like he originally promised he would.

But there's something else here. Moses is demonstrating a core conviction that was true for him as a man of God, and must be true for all of us today. He was not going to do ministry and life without God's manifest presence. He gives God Almighty, his trusted friend, a frank ultimatum: “If you don't go with me, I'm not going!” Moses understood the futility of trying to lead 2 million headstrong people in his own power. He had tried that earlier in his life and failed miserably. Now he humbly and boldly fleshed out the future words of Solomon in Ps. 127: “unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build at all.” And the well-known words of our Savior in John 15: “apart from me you can do nothing.” Friends and fellow gospel workers, we too need the Holy Spirit's presence and empowerment if we would bear much lasting fruit. Parenting, grand-parenting, leading a Connection Group, coaching a football or basketball team, handling a difficult work situation: we must acknowledge our need for God's presence in all things and lean into Him at all times.

- Then Moses makes his second appeal, he boldly presses in further still. He said, **“For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?”** God, if you desert your people, how does that demonstrate your favor? No, God, what makes us distinct, special, set apart, and one-of-a-kind is your presence among us.
- This second appeal by Moses is for God's reputation among the people of the world. And the reason that is important is that God intended that his people

would be a “blessing to all the families of the earth”, going all the way back to God’s promises to Abraham in Genesis 12. Yahweh intended for the Jews to live in such a distinctive way that all who would come into contact with them—like the Queen of Sheba coming to Solomon^{vi}--would be drawn to the one true Creator God.

- As we reflect on Moses interceding boldly for God’s wayward people, vs. his own ease and comfort, we are reminded that it’s never just about us. We tend to think of the Christian life as an individual race. Like this race from Chariots of Fire^{vii}. Video clip The Christian life is an individual race, sometimes inspiring. We all have a unique race to run, as Hebrews 12:1 says. But’s also more than that: it’s a team effort. We had an amazing demonstration of this last Saturday at Upward race. (tell story)
 - If you were to read the very next paragraph, and the rest of Exodus, you would see that the LORD answered Moses prayer. God did lead his people to the promised land. Which leads to this question:
 - Who are you interceding for that they may experience God’s presence? Who among the peoples of the world?
 - A family member? A neighbor or co-worker? An international student that you have a class with or live nearby?
 - I am incredibly blessed by the fact that under the leadership of Ward Leek, 57 prayer warriors from Christ Community are praying for our 56 Upward basketball teams, and our group of refs. And I’m excited to see the Lord growing our number of international players—we have 65 internationals playing basketball this season, which is almost one out of every 7 players.
- ◆ **Let’s consider some final application, and look at some ways we can “practice His presence,”** as Brother Lawrence put it in his delightful classic.^{viii}
- First of all, we need to be aware of how God has made us, and discover our spiritual pathways. What are those things that draw you closest to God? For some of you it may be enjoying God in his creation; others of you it may be connecting with him intellectually, being contemplative, or service. Gary Thomas’ book “Spiritual Pathways” lists 11 different ways God has wired us to connect with him.^{ix}
 - Secondly, we need to build times of fellowship with God into our daily rhythms.

Remember how Daniel would pray each morning, afternoon, and evening? Alan Kraft in his excellent book *Good News for Those Trying Harder*^x talks about building into our lives frequent moments in which we intentionally stop and become aware of His presence. How do you use your windshield time for example? How do you use down times throughout your day? Why not use those times to enjoy God's presence by thanking Him, singing praises to him, or praying for things dear to both your hearts?

- The third application is the most painful: repenting of our **worldliness**. A.W. Tozer said it well in his prayer in the classic *The Pursuit of God*: "I repent of my sinful preoccupation with visible things. The world has been too much with me. Thou hast been here and I knew it not..."^{xi}

And this quote from C.S. Lewis:

- It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."^{xii}

Friends, don't settle for anything less than God's manifest presence. Insist on it.

Let's pray: Lord we don't want to settle for merely going through the motions and living so-called self-sufficient lives. Ignite our hearts with the truth that you desire fellowship with us, and that we no longer need a tent or tabernacle or temple building. We are your temple. We rejoice in that truth this morning, amen.

ⁱ Andrew Peterson, *On the Edge of the Dark Sea of Darkness*, pp. 52-53

ⁱⁱ 1 Thessalonians 5:19. We can also grieve the Holy Spirit--Ephesians 4:30

ⁱⁱⁱ Common grace is a theological term that states God in his love and kindness blesses unbelievers also in many different ways. See Matthew 5:45b

^{iv} James 4:8

^v John 4:24

^{vi} 1 Kings 10:1-13

^{vii} Youtube Get Up Lad

^{viii} Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*

^{ix} His list of spiritual pathways includes Creation, Contemplative, Worship, Activist, Relational, Serving, Intellectual, Sensates (loving God with the senses), Traditionalists (loving God through ritual and symbol), Ascetics (loving God in solitude and simplicity), Enthusiasts (loving God through mystery and celebration).

^x Alan Kraft, *Good News for Those Trying Harder*, p. 175.

^{xi} A.W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*, p. 41

^{xii} C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*