

My Presence

Marvelous "My's" of the Bible

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And I want to leave you with a promise that I trust will be a blessing to you not only today but as you go down this year as we step out into the unknown future of 2017. I trust that this promise will be a bright light to you and that will sustain you whatever 2017 brings to us.

Exodus 33 and we're reading at verse 12, and maybe on this first day of the new year, out of respect for the word of God, we'd stand as we do our reading together. Let's stand together Exodus 33:12.

12 ... Moses said unto the LORD, See, thou sayest unto me, Bring up this people: and thou hast not let me know whom thou wilt send with me. Yet thou hast said, I know thee by name, and thou hast also found grace in my sight. 13 Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, shew me now thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight: and consider that this nation is thy people. 14 And he said [the Lord said], My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest. 15 And he said unto him, If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence. 16 For wherein shall it be known here that I and thy people have found grace in thy sight? is it not in that thou goest with us? so shall we be separated, I and thy people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth. 17 And the LORD said unto Moses, I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken: for thou hast found grace in my sight, and I know thee by name. 18 And he said, I beseech thee, shew me thy glory. 19 And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy. 20 And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live. 21 And the LORD said, Behold, there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock: 22 And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a clift of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by: 23 And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen.

Ending in verse 23. You may be seated. Let's keep our Bibles open there at Exodus 33.

Years ago in the deep South in the United States of America, a Baptist church was struggling over the question whether to allow an African-American gentleman to join their church. This brother had been the caretaker of this church for many many years and he decided now that he wanted to be part of the church family. A special vote of the church was called for as they pondered the whole issue of integration, and finally the church met and the caretaker lost the vote to become a member of that Baptist church. Later that evening, the old gentleman was sitting on the porch, he was sitting in his favorite swing on the porch and he was thinking about how he had been rejected by that church and he said, "Lord, I don't understand those folks. I tried to join that church but they voted me out." About the same time, the Lord seemed to speak from heaven and to say, "Don't worry, my son, about it. I've been trying to get into that church for years and they won't let me in either." A. W. Tozer once said, "The world is perishing for a lack of the knowledge of God and the church is famishing for a lack of the presence of God." Vance Havner once said, "Nothing is scarier in churches today than the absence of the presence of God."

Nothing is scarier in churches today than the absence of the presence of God and yet is this not the very thing that Moses longed for? Here are the children of Israel, they're making their way toward the Promised Land but now sin has entered into the camp of Israel and God has indicated the withdrawal of his presence. If you look at chapter 33 in verse 2 for a moment, you will see the departure of God's presence. God says to Moses, "I will send an angel before thee." If you look at verse 12, you'll see the desire for God's presence, "and thou hast not let me know whom thou wilt send with me." If you look at verse 14, you'll see the demonstration of God's presence, "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest." If you look at verse 15, you'll see the devotion to God's presence, "If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence."

Henry Bosch of Radio Bible Class and some of you use, knows Radio Bible Class, knows tells us that at the age of 7, he was taken to hospital apparently suffering from tuberculosis and despite his constant pain, he found peace in the hymns that his parents had taught him in his younger day. One day he was singing these words, "If Jesus go with me, I'll go anywhere." And a lady came to visit him in a wheelchair and taking his tiny hand in her hand, she began to cry. Years later, Henry discovered from his father that this same lady, this Christian lady, became very upset when the doctor insisted that she would go to hospital. Full of self-pity, she complained, "Lord, I've been trying to serve you for many years now and now you're taking me into a place where there will be absolutely no Christian fellowship. I guess it doesn't pay to serve you." No sooner had she landed in her hospital room when she heard little Henry singing, "It's heaven to me, where ere I be, if Christ is there." And ashamed of our rebellious attitude toward the Lord, she decided to meet this one with the high soprano voice who was singing this song, expecting to meet a mature Christian. She was absolutely astounded to meet a little boy of seven years of age who was struggling with tuberculosis and he hadn't perhaps even the opportunity of

seeing that day out, and that experience taught that lady that she could rejoice in every circumstance of life because the Lord was always with her.

Here's Moses and he's getting this assurance. He's not asking assurance in relation to route or provision, he's not asking assurance as to map or to supplies, one thing alone filled his thoughts, that the Lord's presence that had been his stay and strength through all the days of the march, should be with them still. And so he comes before the Lord, if you look at verse 12, he approaches God and he says, he says to the Lord in verse 12, "See, thou sayest unto me, Bring up this people: and thou hast not let me know whom thou wilt send with me. Yet thou hast said, I know thee by name, and thou hast also found grace in my sight. Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, shew me now thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight: and consider that this nation is thy people." God knew what Moses was after. It wasn't the presence of the angels, it was the presence of God for which Moses was pleading. And so God condescends to his servant and he says, "My presence shall go with thee and I will give thee rest."

You know, this promise, my dear friends, is a benediction in itself but when you take this promise and put it into its context, it becomes even more beautiful. It's like taking that diamond ring, that jewel, that engagement ring that you got at Christmas, it's like taking that ring and putting it into its proper setting; it even becomes more beautiful, it enhances its beauty. I want you to look at this promise in its context this morning and I want to give you three things about this promise that I trust will sustain you as you go down the year 2017. Notice, first of all, the timing of it. The timing of it in the life of Moses. And then secondly, I want you to notice the telling of it from the lips of God. And then thirdly, I want you to notice the testing of it in our own experience.

The timing of it, when was this promise given? Well, this statement was made to Moses during a deplorable time in the history of the nation of Israel. You remember that Israel had sinned. While Moses was on the mountain receiving the 10 Commandments and the detailed plans of the tabernacle, the people turned aside to dancing and nakedness before the golden calf and Moses returns to the camp and he sees the idol worship in progress, the tables of the law dropped from his hand, he grinds them in powder and then he takes that calf and he casts it down, and yet if the first sight of Israel's idolatry and immorality makes Moses mad, the thought of it afterwards dazes him with grief. A broken-hearted man, he comes before the Lord and he sobs out this pitiful prayer, "Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin--; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written." Moses prays and God answers. God says, "Moses, I'm not going to go with you to the Promised Land, I'm going to send an angel." A gracious answer indeed, but to a man like Moses, it was an answer and yet no answer. Here he was, he was heart-broken, he was disillusioned, he was apprehensive about the future, he was yearning more than ever before for the assurance of God's presence. What consolation was there in the words, "I will send an angel with thee"? It wasn't angels that Moses was longing for, it was the personal presence of the Lord. And God condescended and he said, "Moses, my presence shall go with thee. I will give thee rest."

I want you to see in the context that here was a promise that was given to a man with little help, a man with little help, a lonely man. He was perhaps more lonely in the midst of 2 ½ million people than he was at the backside of the desert when he was looking after the flock of Jethro. Why, even Aaron, his brother, had let him down. Moses was disillusioned. The people on whom such high hopes were set had proved faithless. The tables of the law lay in fragments. The wrath of God was burning against these stiffnecked idolaters per Moses. His disappointment was overwhelming and yet it was to this man, at this time, that God gave this promise, "My presence shall go with thee and I will give thee rest."

I wonder am I speaking to some disappointed Christian this morning? Maybe you started out in the Christian life with godly intentions and high hopes but maybe experiences brought disillusionment and now you're disappointed with life, there is that incurable, that dull ache within your heart this morning and you're disappointed about the way events have transpired. Maybe you're here this morning and you're disappointed with life, you're disappointed with circumstances, perhaps you're even disappointed with your fellow believers. My friend, this promise is specifically for you this morning, "My presence shall go with thee and I will give thee rest." You see, the Lord delights to dwell with the disappointed that the sense of their disappointment may be swallowed up in the compensation of his fellowship. The Lord is with you this morning and he wants to become so real to you that your disappointment will be transformed into triumph by his realized presence.

It's given to a man with little help. Look at the context again. This promise was given to a man with little heart, a man whose great work for God seemed to be falling to pieces. I mean, how deeply discouraged Moses must have been. Not only had the people proved utterly undependable and perverted and 3,000 Israelites would be slain by the sword, and the tabernacle had been placed outside the camp of Israel, but now the almighty God, he indicates the withdrawal of his presence from his people. It's true that God said an angel would lead them to the Promised Land but, my dear friends, an angel's presence without God himself means guidance without fellowship and despondent and discouraged, Moses comes before the Lord and he said, "Lord," in effect, "an angel's not good enough. I want your presence."

I wonder this morning are you a discouraged servant? Maybe in the quiet place there has been those falling tears. Maybe you've been jealous for the honor of your Savior and it has wrought nothing but misunderstanding. Maybe you've been faithful in your witness for the Lord and you've seen no souls coming to faith in Jesus Christ. Maybe you've been faithfully sowing the seed among those boys and girls and yet they seem to be so unresponsive. Maybe you're here this morning and you've been seeking down through 2016 for that deeper walk with God, that higher spiritual life, but somehow it hasn't come and depression and despondency has taken hold of you. Discouraged laborer this morning, burdened believer this morning, this promise is for you, "My presence shall go with thee and I will give thee rest." The Lord is really with you and he wants to make his presence a bright living reality in your life.

Years ago, Robert Bruce was a godly Scottish Presbyterian minister. Many flocked to his church to hear this man of God preach, and one occasion a nobleman, an earl, drove a long distance to one of the services and he became impatient for the service to commence. The service hadn't started at the right time and so he spoke to one of the stewards in the aisle and he said, "When's the minister going to come to start the service?" And the steward, he went to the minister's door but he didn't go in through the door, and then he returned to this earl, this nobleman, and he said to him, "He won't come today, your Lordship, for I heard him speak to someone that he cannot go without him, and though he kept on asking, I did not hear the other one answer him at all." Thank God this morning we have the assurance that the other one is really with us. But what a difference it will make if we go down 2017 in the conscious realization of his presence.

Here's a man who's weighed down with the burden of the work of God, a man with little help, a man with little hope, a man with little heart, and then again if you look at the context, here's a man with little hope. Here's a man bending beneath the burden of this great responsibility. He felt that his burden was more than he could bear. He's apprehensive about the future. My friends, did ever a man carry a heavier burden than Moses? You talk about looking after 300+ people, here's a man who's got 2 ½ million people under his care, under God. It was Moses that God had chosen to bring them out of bondage and to bring them into the Promised Land and there was something that Moses longed for more than anything else, it was the presence of God.

You know, when God sets a man apart for special service, there's always that sense of responsibility, there's always that sense of loneliness. As Dr. Paisley who said on one occasion, the true servant of the Lord travels a path where others cannot accompany him, and this has made him long for the Lord's own dear presence with him. And has God ever failed us? And to those of you this morning who bear heavy burdens, to those of you who are lonely because of your attachment to Jesus Christ, here's a promise that comes with heavenly cheer, "My presence shall go with thee and I will give thee rest." I wonder is this promise specifically for you this morning? Maybe you're here, you're here this morning with little help, you're here with little heart, you're here with little hope, you're burdened because of your work for the Master and God's saying to you as he said to Moses, "My presence shall go with thee and I will give thee rest."

The timing of it. But look at verse 14 again, notice the telling of it. Not only when did this promise come but what did this promise mean? That the Lord did relate this promise to Moses in spoken words is made clear from verse 14, look at it, "And he said." And you say, "What did God say?" He said, "My presence shall go with thee. I will give thee rest." John Wesley said upon his deathbed, "Best of all, God is with us." You say, "What's this promise all about?" It's all about companionship. It's all about fellowship. You notice that the Lord assures Moses of certain companionship. He says, "My presence shall." Dr. Sidlow Baxter says the divine assurances are never weakened by any suggestion of falteringness, they are all yes and in him, amen, that is, they are doubly sure.

And my dear friends, when God says, "My presence shall go with thee," he means that without any perhaps, with any peradventure, he'll be with each one of you believing

friends right to the end of the journey. "The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose, he will not desert to expose. That soul though all hell should endeavor to shake, he'll never, no, never, no, never forsake." God's promising Moses certain companionship. There's the certainty of his presence.

Notice something else, there's the intimacy of his presence. Did you notice the first word in the promise, it's that precious pronoun "My," and it's this pronoun that has the emphasis here. God has promised to send an angel. Far from satisfying Moses, but now at length he tenderly yields to his servant's moving entreaty, he says, "My presence shall go with thee." The Septuagint is the Greek translation of the Old Testament and it puts the emphasis on the pronoun. It translates it like this, "I myself will go with thee." Isn't it wonderful to know that the Lord himself will go with you, sir, down through 2017? That priceless, "my promises" to us, the side-by-side, step-by-step, heart-to-heart fellowship of God himself through all our way, "My presence shall go with thee," I tell you, that meant more to Moses than anything else. It meant the close companionship of one who was close enough to meet Moses' need for guidance, for sustenance, for strength. An unchanging, undeparting friend would journey with him through all the wilderness journeys. A wonderful friend who would sit with him in the tent, who would stand with him in the council, who would go forth with him to the field of battle. My friends, this morning how can we be lonely? How can we experience a sense of loneliness when this eternal friend, this unchanging friend, has promised to go with us down the desert road?

"My presence shall go with thee." Literally translated it goes like this, "My face shall go with thee." You know, that suggests intimacy of fellowship. What a cure for Moses' anxiety. What an antidote for Moses' worry. You know, when you meet someone and they turn their face away from you, what does it indicate? It indicates disapproval. Do you see what God's saying to Moses? He's saying, "My face shall go with thee." He's indicating his gracious favor. Think of it, the face of God, the smile of God, the approval of God, the benediction of God, the grace of God, the company of God as we travel down 2017. My friend, can you see the certainty of his presence? Can you see the intimacy of his presence? Look again at the promise. Can you see the serenity of his presence? "My presence shall go with thee. I will give thee rest."

You know, there are many who think of the rest as the land of Canaan. Many commentators tell us that the rest here speaks of Canaan. But Bishop Handley Moule tells us there are two possible sorts of rest, one is rest after toil, the laying down of the weary at the end of the journey, the other is rest in toil, the internal, the deep repose, the liberty of a spirit that has found a hidden refuge and retreat while the march, the battle, the climb, are still in full course. In other words, there's a rest after toil and there's a rest in toil.

Is that not the kind of rest that God promised to Moses? Not rest after the journey but rest in the journey? Is that not what you and I need today? What restlessness there is. What hurry, what strain, what unsettledness, what tension. Is it not so easy for us as Christian believers to become nervous, agitated, anxious? How we need that soothing inner quiet that God promises here. The rest, you see, grows out of his presence. The rest grows out

of the consciousness of the presence of God. The consciousness of God's presence gives to the heart a rest, a peace, a stillness that nothing else can do. "Give rest from doubt," says old Sidlow Baxter, "for when God is real, doubt dies." It gives rest from fear, for if God be for us, who can be against us? It gives rest from anxiety, for if the Lord is walking with us, nothing can really harm us. It gives rest from the future, for we know this morning that all things work together for good to them that love the Lord.

"My presence shall go with thee. I will give thee rest." Do you know this rest? Do you need this rest? Look at the promise for the final time, the timing of it in the life of Moses, the telling of it from the lips of God, but notice the testing of it in our own experience. Can we doubt, my dear friends, for one moment that Moses took this promise and put it to the test? This man who was burdened about his ministry, this man with little heart, little help, little hope, can we doubt for one moment that Moses took this precious promise from the lips of God and he put it to the test? He believed, you see, that what God promised he's able to perform, and you and I need to take this promise this morning and put it to the test. You see, we need to take this promise and put it to the test in the warfare of the Lord. You remember that when Israel came out of bondage, they were brought out by two things: they were brought out by the blood of the lamb, and they were brought out by the hand of the Lord. And do you remember then they came to the Red Sea, they were in a cul-de-sac, and the sea was before them and the mountains were behind them and the Egyptians were behind them? And do you remember the angel, the presence of the Lord? Do you remember the angel of the Lord moved, the presence of God moved from before them and moved behind them? And so the presence of God stood between Pharaoh and Israel.

The protecting presence of God. Do you and I not need that protecting presence every day? I was reading about a Christian missionary many many years ago by the name of Felix of Nola who was being pursued by his tribe who were hostile to his faith in Christ, and his strength was gone and he was up in the mountains and he was among the caves, and seeing a narrow cave, he crawled into this little cave to escape what meant certain death for him, and he went through this narrow cave and he saw this cave and he crawled into it and he prayed to the Lord for safety and protection and he committed his life to the Lord, and scarcely had he entered the cave when a spider began to weave a web across the entrance to the cave, and before long his pursuers had reached the entrance to the cave but when one of them noticed the spider's web, he said, "It's useless to go in there. Had he have gone in there, that web would have been broken." They hurried on and the servant of God escaped.

I want to tell you as you and I go down the year 2017, you and I will need the protecting presence of the Lord. "I need thy presence every hour, what but thy grace can foil the tempter's power. Who like thyself, my guide and stay can be, through cloud and sunshine, oh, abide with me." Take the promise of the Lord, prove the promise of the Lord in the warfare of the Lord, but not only in the warfare of the Lord, in the work of the Lord.

Remember Moses felt that his work was falling to pieces. He is a man who is burdened and despondent and depressed, and God comes near to him and he says, "Moses, my

presence shall go with thee. I'll give you rest." In 1896, Glasgow University conferred on Dr. David Livingstone the degree of Doctor of Law, and as old Livingstone stood to speak, there was that respect of silence and he was gaunt and he was haggard as a result of his hardship in tropical Africa, and his left arm was lying crushed by his side, it was hanging helplessly at his side, it had been torn apart by a lion, and then Livingstone announced his resolve to go to Africa and this is what he said, "Would you like me to tell you what supported me through all those years of exile among a people whose language I couldn't understand, whose attitude toward me was always uncertain and often hostile? It was this: lo, I am with you always even unto the end of the age. On those words," said Livingstone, "I staked everything and they never failed."

In that ministry that you're seeking to exercise for the Lord among the kids, the elderly, the women, the old folk, will you take this promise with you? "My presence shall go with thee. I'll give thee rest." Prove it. Test it. Prove it and test it in the warfare of the Lord. Prove it and test it in the work of the Lord. Prove it and test it in the will of the Lord, that will that is often baffling but is always best. My friends, when you think of the will of the Lord for Moses, what crises he had. Here was a man who was going from one crisis to the next. On one occasion there was a water crisis, on the next occasion there was a food crisis, one the next occasion there was a crowd crisis. Here was a man who must have felt that he was stumbling from one crisis to the next. Maybe that's the way you feel this morning on this day of a new year. Maybe like Jacob you're facing a family crisis, Esau wanted to kill him. You remember that God met with Jacob at Bethel and from the top of that ladder God gave him the promise of his presence, "Jacob, I am with thee." Imagine the twister, the deceiver, "Jacob, I am with thee. I'll keep thee in all places whither thou goest."

Maybe like the three Hebrew children, this morning you're facing a fiery crisis. You remember them in Daniel. They wouldn't bow and they wouldn't budge, and when the old king cast them into that fiery furnace, thank God they wouldn't burn. But the Lord was with them. "When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie, my grace all-sufficient shall be thy supply. The flames shall not hurt thee, I only design thy dross to consume, thy gold to refine."

Maybe as you step out into 2017, it will not be, my dear friends, a family crisis, it'll not be a fiery crisis, maybe like Paul it'll be a friendship crisis for as he looked around the courtroom in Rome. I was talking to a brother the other day who was at court with his wife. His wife was taken from him for a little while and she was held in a holding center. He said it was terrible, terrible. You think of Paul in Rome, "At my first defense, at my first trial, no man stood with me." Nigh as he looked around a courtroom of Rome, there wasn't one friendly face, there wasn't one Christian believer who stood with him. "Not withstanding, the Lord stood with me and strengthened me."

Maybe like David, in 2017 you'll be facing the final crisis. Maybe some of you feel this morning that this will be the year when the Lord will call you home. Well, don't fear for the Lord who hasn't failed you in life will never forsake you in death. He says, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of evil, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me." Maybe

you're here this morning and somehow you're seeking to grasp with God's mysterious will, maybe like Jacob you're feeling the fury of your family, maybe like the three Hebrew children you're feeling the fierceness of the fire, maybe like Paul you're feeling the forgetfulness of friends, maybe like David you're anticipating the finality of death. When Henry Frances Lyte found there was no hope of recovery from his consumption, he went into his study, he looked death straight in the face, he took his pen and he wrote these 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."

After winning a bronze medal in the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens, wrestler Rulon Gardner took off his shoes, he placed them in the center of the mat where he wrestled and he walked away in tears. And through that symbolic act, Rulon Gardner announced his retirement from the sport which had defined his life for many years. Times of walking away come to us all and they can be emotionally wrenching, and as you go down this year, a loved one may walk away in death, a friend may walk away in distance, a son or daughter may walk away in marriage, a colleague may walk away in work, a servant of God may walk away to a different sphere of service, but my presence shall go with thee and I will give thee rest. For when we know the Lord, we'll never have to walk alone into the unknown future. Because he goes with us, we can step into that future with the utmost confidence.

I never walk alone. Christ walks beside me. He is the dearest friend I've ever known. With such a friend to comfort and to guide me, I never, no, I never walk alone.

The timing of it, the telling of it, the testing of it. God's promise for the present, God's rest for the future. What more can we want? He with us now, we with him then. Take it with you, "My presence shall go with thee and I will give thee rest."

Let's pray.