

Place: Lurgan Baptist 12:1:2014

MOSES, THE SERVANT OF THE LORD

Reading: Exodus 33:1-15

16. A PRECIOUS PROMISE FOR A PRESSURIZED PROPHET

Some years ago in an evangelistic service in our country the preacher was explaining what it means to trust the Lord in every circumstance of life. Concluding his message he repeated several times these words, “*It means that in every circumstance of life we can keep on saying for this I have Jesus.*” Before the service concluded he left it open for a while for testimonies. The young lady who had been playing the piano stood up and said, “I have to leave shortly so I would like to be the first to testify. Just a short time ago I was handed this telegram. It reads ‘**Mother is critically ill. Come home immediately.**’ *When I read the telegram I knew that tonight’s message was for me. My eyes looked up to the Lord and said, ‘for this I have Jesus.’ Instantly a peace and strength flooded my soul.*” A month later that evangelist received a letter from the same young lady. It read, “*thank you for the message given that evening. Life has become an uninterrupted psalm of victory, for I have come to realise that no matter what life throws at me for this I have Jesus.*”

Maude Royden said, “*When you have nothing left but God then you become aware that God is enough.*”

The problem for Moses was that God had indicated that he was withdrawing His presence. Do you see what God says in (33:2) “*And I will send an angel before thee,*” God is so displeased with His people that He says they can on to Canaan without Him. Why was this ? Well, the nation had sinned. While Moses is in the mount receiving the commandments, and the instructions regarding the tabernacle (31:18) the people “*turned aside quickly,*” to idolatry and are dancing, naked before the golden calf. Moses returns to the camp and sees the idol-worship in progress. The tables of the law drop from his trembling hands. He seizes the wretched image, burns it in the fire, and then grinds it to powder. He then sets up the tent of meeting for the purpose of seeking genuine spiritual revival. You see, it was not enough for the people to turn away from their idols. They must wholeheartedly turn back to the Lord. What a state Israel were in. There was the loss of God’s presence.

1. It was a Time of Indifference:

Words and actions lay bare the heart. (Matt 12:34-35)

(a) Do you their Indifference Toward Their Leader:

“*As for this Moses the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt we wot not what is become of him.*” (32:1) They said “*We don’t know where Moses is or what he’s doing,*” and the implication is “*We don’t care.*” You can tell, a lot about a church by their attitude toward God’s man.

(b) Do you see their Indifference Toward their Lord:

At their monthly business meeting they proposed that Aaron made them “ *new gods,* ” to follow. You see,

2. It was a Time of Idolatry:

For Aaron made a calf which means God was degraded to being a cow. Of course calves are still popping out of the fire. You see, when we give to anything the allegiance and devotion that belong to God alone we are guilty of idolatry. 1. 2.

3. It was a Time of Indulgence:

Naked Israelites, dancing feverishly around a golden calf. (32:6) No wonder God says, “ *And I will send an angel before thee.* ” (33:2) My are there many believers today who grieve over the loss of God’s presence and blessing ? As long as the church machinery keeps running, churning out more and more programmes and producing good numbers, church leaders are willing to overlook the absence of any great spiritual power. And as long as their lives are comfortable individual Christians are the same. But ‘ *a business as usual,* ’ attitude will never bring revival. Moses understood this, do we ? It’s interesting that in this passage we see great things in not so great times.

1. In (33:7-11) we see A Great Preparation:

2. In (33:12-13) we see A Great Prayer:

3. In (33:14) we see A Great Promise:

God knew what Moses was after. It was not the presence of angels (32:34 33:2) but the presence of God Himself for which Moses was pleading and so the Lord said, “ *My presence rest.* ” (33:14) **A Promise for a Pressurized Prophet.** Now I want to do three things with this promise. I want to,

(1) EXPLORE THE CONTEXT OF THIS PROMISE

You see, this promise is a benediction in itself, but it is when we take it with its context that its fuller glory breaks in upon us. A jewel is beautiful in itself, but its beauty is enhanced by an appropriate setting. So it is with this wonderful statement. You see, as we consider the context of this promise we see that it was given to

(a) A MAN WITH LITTLE HELP:

A lonely man, perhaps more lonely in the midst of two and half million people than when he was leading the flock of Jethro at the backside of the dessert. Why even Aaron his brother has let him down. *I mean isn't Aaron pathetic in all this ?* Given the opportunity to stand for the Lord he meekly complied with the desire of the people and when called to account by Moses, lamely explained that he just threw the gold in the fire and the calf miraculously emerged. (32:21-24) *A broken hearted man* he sinks down before the Lord and sobs out the 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.* ”

(32:31-32) Moses was disillusioned. You see, the people on whom such high hopes were set had proved faithless. The tables of the law lay in fragments below the mount. (32:19) The wrath of God burned against these stiff-necked idolaters. (32:10-11) Poor Moses. His disappointment was great. Yet it was to this man, at this time, that the comforting word was given, “ *My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.* ” Am I speaking to some disappointed Christian ? You started out with godly intentions, high hopes, but experience has brought disillusionment, and now you are disappointed with life. There is an incurable, dull ache in your heart about the way things have transpired. Perhaps you’re disappointed with life, yourself, other Christians.

My this promise is specifically for you. “ *My presence shall go with thee and I will give thee rest.* ” You see, the Lord delights to dwell with the disappointed, that their sense of disappointment may be swallowed up in the compensation of His friendship. The Lord is with you, and wanting to become so real to you that your disappointment shall be transformed into triumph by His realised presence. (a)

(b) A MAN WITH LITTLE HEART:

A man, whose great work for the Lord seemed to be falling to pieces. How deeply discouraged, Moses must have been. Not only have the people proved utterly undependable and perverted (32:25) and three thousand Israelites have fallen by sword (32:28) and the tabernacle, been removed from the corrupted camp,

but the Lord Himself has indicated the withdrawal of His personal presence from the people. (33:3) Its true that God said an angel shall lead the host, but an angel’s presence without God Himself means mere guidance without fellowship. Discouraged and dispirited Moses comes before the Lord and says, “ *See thou sayest unto me, bring up this people* ” (33:12-13) Moses is asking for specifics as to this angel is, but he really didn’t want an angel, he wanted the Lord. Tell me, are you a discouraged servant this ? Why those falling tears ? Have you been jealous for the honour of your Lord, and it has seemed to bring nothing but misunderstanding ? Have you been faithfully witnessing for your Saviour, yet you have seen no souls coming to Him ?

Have you been earnestly seeking to win those children for Christ, yet they seem so unresponsive ? Have you been seeking for a deeper spiritual life, but somehow it has not come and depression has taken you ? Discouraged child of God, this promise is specifically for you, “ *My presence shallrest.* ” The Lord is really with you, and He wants to make His presence a “ *living bright reality,* ” in your life. You see, it’s in the realization of His presence, that there lies the secret of unflinching courage.

Years ago, Robert Bruce, a godly Scottish minister attracted many people to his church. On one occasion an Earl drove a good distance to one of the services, and getting impatient for the service to commence, he asked the steward when the minister would appear. The officer went to the vestry door, but hearing conversation

within, he refrained from knocking, and then returned to the Earl saying, “ *He won’t today your lordship, for I heard him say to Someone that he cannot go without Him, and through he kept on asking, I did not hear the Other answer him at all.* ” Thank God, we have the assurance that the “ **Other,** ” One is always with us, but what a difference it will make, if we travel on in the conscious realisation of His presence. (a) (b)

(c) A MAN WITH LITTLE HOPE:

A man bending beneath the weight of a great responsibility, feeling that his burden was more than he could bear, and apprehensive about the future. My did ever a man carry a heavier burden than Moses ? Responsible for two and a half million people. Under God to “ *bring them out and bring them in.* ” Is it therefore surprising that above everything else Moses longed for the personal presence of God Himself ? (33:12) You see, when God calls a man out for “ **special service,** ” there is always a sense of responsibility plus a sense of loneliness. The true servant of the Lord will tread a path where others cannot accompany him, and this has made him long for the Lord’s own presence with them.

And has God ever failed us ? To those this who bear heavy burdens, and are lonely because of your attachment to the Lord Jesus, this promise comes with heavenly cheer, “ *My presence shall go with thee and I will give thee rest.* ” My is this promise specifically for you ? Are you here this with little help, little heart, little hope, burdened because of your work for the

Master ? He says to you now as He said to Moses then “ *My presence shall go with thee and I will give rest.* ”

(2) EXPOUND THE CONTENT OF THIS PROMISE

That the Lord did relate this promise to Moses in spoken words is made clear from (33:14) “ *And He said,* ” What did He say ? “ *My presence ...,* ” Hear again John Wesley’s death bed exultation, “ *The best of all is God is with us.* ” Now that word “ *us,* ” is important because you see the Lord was referring here to Moses alone. He was essentially saying, “ *Moses, my withdrawal from my people does not mean that I have withdrawn from you. I will be with you even though I will not be with them. And my presence with you will be sufficient for you.* ” But Moses would not settle for this. He says “ *If thy presence go not with us, carry us not up hence,* ” (33:15) While God says “ *you,* ” Moses says “ *us.* ” You see, he would not have for himself that which his people would not share. Now what is this promise all about ? Companionship.

(a) CERTAIN COMPANIONSHIP:

“ *My presence shall ...,* ” You see, the Divine assurances are never weakened by any suggestion of faltering-ness. When God says, “ *My presence shall go with thee,* ” He means that without any perhaps or peradventure He will be with each of us right through to the end.

*The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose
He will not, He will not desert to its foes
That soul, though all hell should endeavour to shake
He'll never, no never, no never forsake*

(b) CLOSE COMPANIONSHIP:

Did you notice the first word in the promise is that precious pronoun “*my*,” and it is this pronoun which has the emphasis here. God’s promise to send an angel far from satisfied Moses. (33:2) But now at length He tenderly yields to His servants moving entreaty and says, “*My presence shall go with thee.*” The Septuagint, recognising the emphasis on the pronoun here, translates it, “*I Myself will go with thee.*” That priceless “*my*,” pledges 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, this meant more than infallible superintendence from a distance heaven.

It meant the close companionship of One who was enough to meet all Moses’ need for guidance, and sustenance, and strength. An unchanging, undeparting Friend should company with Him, through all the wilderness journeying, a wonderful Friend who would sit with him in the tent, stand with him in the council, and go forth with him to the field of battle. *How then can we be lonely ?* How can we experience a sense of loneliness, when this everlasting Friend has promised to travel with us down the desert road. “*My presence,*” literally translated, “*My face shall go with thee.*” That suggests intimacy of fellowship. Was that not a

beautiful antidote to Moses’ gloomy anxiety ? There can be no darkness in that life where regular communion with the Lord, keeps the soul bathed in the glory light of the Divine smile. You know, that when someone turns their face on us, it indicates disapproval. Do you see what God is doing here, when He says, “*My face shall go with thee,*” He is indicating His gracious favour. Think of it. The face of God, His smile, His favour, His company, as together we travel down the path of life. But this promise not only assured Moses of, (a) (b)

(c) CALM COMPANIONSHIP:

“*My presence shall go with thee and I will give thee rest,*” Now many think feel that the “rest,” spoken of here refers to Canaan (Deut 3:20) But Hanley Moule says, “*there are two possible sorts of rest. One is rest after toil, the lying down of the weary at the end of the march. The other is rest in toil, the internal and deep repose and liberty of a spirit which has found a hidden refuge and retreat, while the march, the battle, the climb are still in full course.*”

In other words, there is a rest after toil, and there is a rest in toil. Was it not this latter kind of rest that was promised to Moses ? ***Not rest after, but rest in.*** Is this not the kind of rest that we need ? For what restlessness there is today. What hurry and strain, what unsettledness and tension. Is it not so easy for us as believers to become agitated, nervous and anxious ? How we need that soothing inner quiet that God promises here. *You see, the rest grows out of the*

*presence. The consciousness of God's presence gives to the heart a rest, peace, stillness that nothing else can give. It gives rest **from Doubt:** for when God is real doubt dies. It gives rest **from Fear:** for "if God be for us who can be against us." (Rom 8:31) It gives rest **from Anxiety:** for if the Lord walks with us nothing can really harm us, it gives rest from fear about **the Future:** for "we know that all things work together for good to them that love God." (Rom 8:28) "My presence shall go with thee and I will give thee rest." Why, these are the very words that fell from the lips of our Lord ? "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." (Matt 11:28) You see, it is in the Lord Jesus that God fulfils His promised rest to us. It is in the realised presence of the Risen Lord that the Christian finds a repose of heart that the world can neither give or take away. My do you know this rest ? Do you need this rest ? (1) (2)*

(3) EXPERIENCE THE COMFORT FROM THIS PROMISE

I mean does this promise not bring comfort to your heart, consolation to your soul, and contentment to your mind ? "My presence shall rest," Can you imagine the comfort Moses experienced from this promise,

(a) IN THE WARFARE OF THE LORD:

Do you recall Israel when they were brought out of Egypt by the blood of the Lamb ? They were in a cul-de-sac. There was no way out. The Egyptians were behind them, the sea was before them, the mountains

were around them, but the enemy could not touch them. Why ? Because the "angel of God," the presence of God stood between Israel and Pharaoh ! (14:19-20) My do we not need His protecting presence every day ? Years ago, a Christian missionary, Felix of Nola was being pursued by a hostile tribe. His strength was almost gone and seeing a narrow cave, he crawled into it, prayed for safety and committed himself to the care of the Lord. Scarcely had he entered when a spider began to weave a web across the entrance to the cave. Before long his pursuers came and were about to search the cave when one of them noticed a spiders web and said, "it is useless to enter here, for had he gone in he surely would have broken that web." They hurried on in search of him and the servant of the Lord escaped. My every hour we need the protecting presence of our God and Saviour.

*I need Thy presence every passing hour,
What but Thy grace can foil the tempter's power
Who like Thyself my guide and stay can be
Through cloud and sunshine, O abide with me*

(b) IN THE WORK OF THE LORD:

To a man whose great work for the Lord seemed to be falling to pieces the Lord says, "My presence rest," In 1896 Glasgow University conferred on Dr. David Livingstone the degree of Doctor of Laws. As Dr. Livingstone rose to speak he was received in respectful silence. He was gaunt, haggard, as a result of his hardships in tropical Africa. His left arm crushed by a lion, was hanging helplessly at his side. He announced

his resolve to return to Africa and then he added,
“ *Would you like me to tell you what supported me through all these years of exile among a people whose language I could not understand, and 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 earth.’ On these words I staked everything and they never failed.*” In that ministry you’re seeking to exercise for the Lord, will you take this promise with you, “ *My presence shall go with thee and I will give thee rest.*”

(c) IN THE WILL OF THE LORD:

God’s will that is often *baffling but that is always best*. For Moses there was a water crisis, a food crisis, a crowd crisis. Indeed Moses have felt at times that he was stumbling from crisis to the next. Is that the way you feel this ? Perhaps like Jacob you’re facing a *Family Crisis*: Esau wanted to kill him. (Gen 27:41) But God met Jacob at Bethel and from the top of that ladder gave him the promise of His presence. “ *And behold I am with thee and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest.*” (Gen 28:15) Maybe like the three Hebrew children you’re facing a *Fiery Crisis*: You see, they would not bow, they would not budge and because of their faithfulness to the Lord they were cast into the fiery furnace and there they would not burn for they would not alone in the fire, the Lord was with them. (Dan 3:24-25)

*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, and thy gold to refine*

I wonder like Paul are you going through a *Friendship Crisis*: For as he looked around that court room he could see no friendly face. He says, “ *At my first defence no man stood with me notwithstanding the Lord stood with me and strengthened me.*” (2 Tim 4:16-17) Perhaps like David you’re anticipating the *Final Crisis*: Somehow you feel this will be the year that the Lord will take you home. Mydon’t fear, for the Lord who has not failed you in life will not forsake you in death. “ *Yea though I walk ... for Thou art with me.*” (Ps 23:4) My do you find yourself grappling with God’s mysterious will ? Like Jacob, are you feeling the *fury of your family* ? Like the three Hebrew children, are you feeling the *fierceness of the fire* ? Like Paul, are you feeling the *forgetfulness of friends* ? Like David are you anticipating the *finality of death* ? When Henry Francis Lyte found there was no hope of recovery from consumption he went into his study and looked death straight in the face and 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*

May you experience the comfort from this promise in 2014 “ **My presence rest.**”

