

Place: Lurgan Baptist 1:1:2017

THE MARVELLOUS ‘ MY,’S OF THE BIBLE

1. MY PRESENCE

Reading: Exodus 33:12-23

Years ago in the Deep South in the U.S.A. a Baptist church was struggling over whether or not to allow an African American gentleman to join their church. This brother had been their caretaker for many years and decided he wanted to be part of the church family. A special vote of the congregation was called for as the church pondered the issue of integration. Finally the vote was announced and the caretaker lost his bid to be a member of that Baptist church. Later that evening the old gentleman was sitting in his porch swing thinking about he had been rejected by the church. He said, “ *Lord I don’t understand them folks. I tried to join their church but they voted me out.*” About that time the Lord seemed to speak from heaven and say “ *Don’t worry about it my child. I have been trying to get into that church for years. They won’t let me in either.*”

A. W. Tozer once said “ *The world is lacking is perishing for lack of the knowledge of God and the church is famishing for want of His presence.*” Vance Havner once said “ *Nothing is scarier in churches today than the absence of the presence of God.*” Yet is this not the very thing that Moses longed for ? Here were the Children of Israel making their way toward the Promised Land, but

now sin has entered the camp and the Lord has indicated the withdrawal of His presence. In (33:2) we see the ***Departure of God’s Presence:*** God says “ *And I will send an angel before thee.*” (33:2) In (33:12) we see the ***Desire for God’s Presence:*** “ *And thou hast not let me know whom thou wilt send with me.*” (33:12) In (33:14) we see the ***Demonstration of God’s Presence:*** “ *My presence shall go with thee and I will give thee rest.*” And in (33:15) we 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 tells us at the age of seven, he was taken to hospital apparently dying from tuberculosis. Despite his constant pain, he found peace in the hymns that his parents had taught him. One day, while he was singing these words, “ *If Jesus goes with me, I’ll go anywhere,*” a lady came to visit him in a wheelchair, taking his hand in hers she began to weep. Years later from his father Henry heard her story. As a Christian she was experiencing constant illness and she became very upset when the Doctor ordered her into hospital.

Full of pity she complained, “ *Lord I’ve tried to be faithful to you all my life, now you are making go where I’ll not even have Christian fellowship. I guess it does not pay to serve you.*” But no sooner had she been brought to her hospital room than she heard little Henry singing, “ *its heaven to me, where’re I be, if He is there.*” Ashamed of her rebellious attitude toward the Lord she decided to meet the one with the high soprano voice who had brought conviction to her heart. Expecting to meet a mature Christian she was surprised to see a little boy who

was so ill that he might not make it through the day. The experience taught her that she could rejoice in every circumstance because the Lord was always with her. Now here is Moses getting this very assurance. Moses did not seek assurance as to route or provisions, he did not ask for map or supplies. One thing alone filled his thoughts, that the Lord's presence which had been his strength and stay through all the days of march should be with him stay. So he comes to the Lord and says, " *See thou sayest unto me*" (32:12-13) 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) Now 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, that we want to consider. Notice,

(1) THE TIMING OF IT: IN THE LIFE OF MOSES

When did this promise come ? Well, this statement was spoken to Moses in connection with one of the most deplorable incidents in the history of Israel. Do you recall that the nation has 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. But 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 sinks down before the Lord and 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.*"

(32:31-32) Moses prays and God answers. Do you see what the Lord says ? (33:1-3) A gracious answer indeed. Yet to a man like Moses, heart-broken, disillusioned, apprehensive about the future, and yearning more than ever for the assurance of the Divine companionship, such an answer was an answer, and yet no answer. I mean what consolation was there in the words, " *I will send an angel before thee.*" (33:2) My it was not angels but the presence of God Himself for which Moses was pleading. What did it matter if Israel *gained* " *the land flowing with milk and honey,*" if the Lord Himself was not with His people ?

So it was in loving-kindness toward his heart stricken servant that the Lord gave this further assurance, " *My presence shall go with thee and I will give thee rest.*" So we see clearly that this promise was spoken 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 desert. Why even Aaron his brother has let him down ? (32:21-24) 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 circumstances, and 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) It’s 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) Are you a discouraged servant this ? Tell me, 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 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 come 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 their 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 then as He said to Moses “ *My presence shall go with thee and I will give rest.*” (1)

(2) THE TELLING OF IT: FROM THE LIPS OF GOD

What did this promise mean ? 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 what is this promise all about ? Companionship. For the Lord assures Moses of,

(a) CERTAIN COMPANIONSHIP:

“ *My presence shall ...,*” As Sidlow Baxter says “ *the Divine assurances are never weakened by any suggestion of faltering-ness.*” They are all “ *Yes and in Him Amen,*” that is they are doubly sure. (2 Cor 1:20) 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 God guiding Moses from a distant heaven. Rather 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 would company with Him, through all the wilderness journeys. 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. My *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 this not a cure for Moses’s anxiety ? 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 God 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.*” My do you know this rest ? Do you need this rest ? (1) (2)

(3) **THE TESTING OF IT: IN OUR OWN EXPERIENCE**

Can we doubt for one moment that Moses did not put this promise to the test ? Surely he would have proved it and discovered that what God promised He was able to perform. (Rom 4:21) 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 must 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 Roman court room he could see no friendly face. He says, “ *At my first defence no man stood with me but all men forsook me I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge. 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*

After winning a bronze medal in the 2004 Olympics in Athens, wrestler Rulon Gardner took off his shoes placed them in the centre of the mat, and walked away in tears. 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 all of us and they can be emotionally wrenching. As we 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*,” in retirement but “ *My presence shall go with thee*,” for when we know the Lord we never have to walk into an unknown future alone. Because He goes with us we can walk into the future with 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*

What a promise. “ *My presence*,” God’s presence for the present and God’s rest for the future. What more can we want ? He with us now, we with Him then. “ ***My presence***,”

