

“PRESENCE MAKES THE DIFFERENCE”

Pastor Mike Corwin

TEXT: EXODUS 33:12-23

GOD’S WORD: PSALM 99

I – EXODUS 32:

Growing up I was a fan of the batman series with Adam West. I’m guessing some of you were also. Remember the end of the show each week? After a preview of what was going to happen in the next episode we heard the words, “Tune in next week – same bat time, same bat channel.” For some reason I heard those words ringing in my ears from all those years ago as I looked at and studied the continuing story of God’s chosen people at the foot of Mount Sinai and their leader Moses. I could almost hear the words from last Sunday telling us to tune in this week, same church time, same church channel, to see the continuing saga of God’s super hero Moses as he fought evil in the ranks of the Israelites.

Pastor Becky had preached about the people of God getting tired of waiting for Moses to come down from his meeting with God on the mountain and they made for themselves a golden calf and worshipped. A lot of things happened in response to this in the rest of chapter 32. God told Moses to go down because the people had once again lost sight of God and rebelled and made themselves an idol. Moses could hear the pagan celebration as he came down the mountain and upon seeing the people’s sin he threw down the stone tablets that God had wrote upon and smashed them before the people. He then burned the calf and ground it into powder, mixed it with water, and made the people drink it. Moses was mad to say the least. When he confronted Aaron, his own brother, about why he would do such a thing Aaron told Moses to relax, Moses of all people knew how evil these people were (32:22). Moses called the followers to his side of the camp, gave them swords, and sent them out among the people where they killed 3,000 of their own people who had turned against God.

Then at the end of the chapter, after doing all of this, he went back up the mountain and plead for God to forgive the sins of the people and if not his own name should be removed from God’s safe list. God said he would remove the names of those who had sinned so terribly against him, but not Moses. God then tells him an angel will be their guide for the continuing journey, and the chapter ends with God sending a plague upon those who had worshipped the idol golden calf.

II – CHAPTER 33 START:

Then as we go from chapter 32 into chapter 33 we can hear the words of the continuing story, “same stubborn people, same wilderness journey, same chosen leader.”

It’s in the beginning of chapter 33 we see the instructions God gives Moses which sets the stage for the discussion Moses has with God beginning in verse 12. At the beginning of the chapter God tells Moses to get the people moving and head them towards the Promised Land. The land he had promised to their ancestors. And he repeats that he will send an angel to go in front of them and guide them and to drive out the people who now possess the land. Up to this point God had been the one who led the way. He had been in a cloud during the day and in a fire at

night. His presence had led them and his presence could be seen when he descended on the tent of meeting where he spoke to Moses. But now he says he isn't going to do that anymore. He will not be present with the people on their journey through the wilderness. In verse 3(b) it says:

"But I will not travel among you, for you are a stubborn and rebellious people. If I did, I would surely destroy you along the way."

Can you even imagine? God, the one you have counted on in all your troubles, the one who got you out of slavery, the one who saved you from Pharaoh by parting the sea, the one who had been your God and chose you with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, says "I'm outta here." My journey with you ends now because I can't be around your stubborn, rebellious behavior anymore or I'll end up taking you all out!" God says you will not be in my presence anymore. My presence will no longer be with you.

III – TEXT:

And that brings us to this morning's text as we continue to look at this interaction between God, Moses, and the chosen people...

Exodus 33:12-23 (NLT)

¹² One day Moses said to the LORD, "You have been telling me, 'Take these people up to the Promised Land.' But you haven't told me whom you will send with me. You have told me, 'I know you by name, and I look favorably on you.' ¹³ If it is true that you look favorably on me, let me know your ways so I may understand you more fully and continue to enjoy your favor. And remember that this nation is your very own people."

¹⁴ The LORD replied, "I will personally go with you, Moses, and I will give you rest—everything will be fine for you."

¹⁵ Then Moses said, "If you don't personally go with us, don't make us leave this place. ¹⁶ How will anyone know that you look favorably on me—on me and on your people—if you don't go with us? For your presence among us sets your people and me apart from all other people on the earth."

¹⁷ The LORD replied to Moses, "I will indeed do what you have asked, for I look favorably on you, and I know you by name."

¹⁸ Moses responded, "Then show me your glorious presence."

¹⁹ The LORD replied, "I will make all my goodness pass before you, and I will call out my name, Yahweh, before you. For I will show mercy to anyone I choose, and I will show compassion to anyone I choose. ²⁰ But you may not look directly at my face, for no one may see me and live." ²¹ The LORD continued, "Look, stand near me on this rock. ²² As my glorious presence passes by, I will hide you in the crevice of the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. ²³ Then I will remove my hand and let you see me from behind. But my face will not be seen."

Moses is arguing God's decision to no longer be present with the people and lead them on their journey. An angel of the Lord is no substitute for the Lord himself. Moses is well aware of the people's evil deeds but is

also aware of another fact. Without God these people are nothing. God chose them with Abraham and God has been present with them down through the generations since. If God now chooses to take his presence away then the people lose their identity as the chosen of God. It is God's presence that sets them apart from all the other peoples and nations of the world. Without God they are the same as everyone else.

God assures Moses that his safety is fine. That he has been singled out and chosen but Moses pleads for the whole nation of Israel. Moses knows that God's presence is essential to Israel's identity and testimony. An angel is not a suitable substitute for God. God agrees he will remain present as Moses has asked.

But you also need to notice that Moses wants more. Moses wants to know God better and asks for God to show him his ways. He wants to understand God on a whole different level than he already does. He's met with him in the tent of meeting and on the mountain to the point he has glowed from being in God's presence. He's seen him reveal himself in a burning bush. But he wants to understand him. He doesn't want to just hear words, doesn't just want some stone tablets, or to see miracles like he has. He wants to KNOW God. What makes him tick? Why does he care so much for this sinful people? Why has he put up with their rebellion and whining? Why will he continue to be with them and guide them and give them the land he promised to their ancestors? He asks for God's presence to be with him in a special way...an open and revealing way.

Then he bravely asks to see God's glory. God arranges to do this, puts him in a cleft of a rock and covers him with his hand so he can't see God's face but all of God's glory from the back.

But I want you to note the order this is in for Moses. He asks for God's presence before he asks for God's glory. You must have the first before you can have the second.

IV – GOD'S PRESENCE:

As I look at this passage I can't help but wonder what it means to the church today. I have to wonder if God is still present with us, his chosen people, today. He sent his presence to the people in a new way through his Son Jesus. Lived a humble life and taught us about God's ways as Moses had prayed. He told us how to live, what God wanted us to do, and how to become members of the Kingdom of God. He was crucified dead and buried to take away our sins so we could be in his presence all of the time as we were forgiven. He was resurrected to give us the promise of eternal life. And he left us with the presence of God in the form of the Holy Spirit so we could carry God's presence with us wherever we are and whatever we do.

The church of Jesus Christ. The church with a big C is supposed to live in this presence and adhere to the teachings of Jesus...of God. We were given the presence just as the early Israelites were but I wonder if we are listening. I wonder if God's presence is still with us, still a factor in our rebellious and idol worshipping lives? Do we listen to the Holy Spirit and follow his leading? At this time in history is God the number one priority in

our lives. Do we make our decisions based on his guidance? Do politician's exhibit his Kingdom and led us into it? Does our education system – elementary, secondary, and post secondary – work in the presence of God and help others to live there too? Can you go into our factories and retail stores and see the presence of God through the actions of the people who are working there or shopping there?

And then let's name the golden calf in the room. How about the church? Are we living and operating in the presence of God? Are our teachings in line with those of Jesus? Are we trying to guide people through the wilderness of life and into the Promis3ed Land of God's eternity? When we make decisions on our boards and committees are we doing it with and in the presence of God? Are we consulting with and seeking the Holy Spirit's guidance in all the matters, both minute and huge?

Is our prayer that God would show us his ways? My standard prayer is that I want to know God/Jesus better today than I did yesterday. I not only want his presence but I want to explore and understand his ways just as Moses did. Do you?

V – GOD'S GLORY:

And just like Moses I want to follow up my request to know God and his presence with the request to see his glory. I want to be so in tune with God's way and living in his presence that I can look nowhere without seeing his glory. Just like it was for Moses, this would be confirmation of God's presence in my life.

The same holds true for the church. If we are in his presence, if we are seeking his way, if we are following the Holy Spirit then his glory will be revealed. I am convinced that God's presence is here with us and that we have seen glimpses of his glory, but I don't believe we've seen it all! I believe that there's another level above what we've experienced already. A level that will bring joy to our hearts and tears to our eyes. A level that will drive us to our knees as we recognize and worship the presence of God, and a glory that will shine so brightly it will be seen and recognized outside these doors.

It is this presence of God that will show us the way through the Covid-19, through the politics and elections, through racism, and through all the things we've faced this year. It's this presence that gives us what the world cannot give and the help and healing we can find no place else. And it's this presence that marks us as special and chosen people of God.

It's this presence that makes us the same God people, the same Jesus saved, and the same eternal citizens no matter what the next episode is (said in batman mode).

AMEN