



A LETTER FROM YOUR PASTOR: MAY 2021 *by Lee Shipp*

THE VALUE OF GOD'S PRESENCE

I couldn't blame God. Honestly, if any of us were in God's place we would have rained down wrath and judgment. We cannot stand to be mistreated. If our mercy was thrown back into our faces, we would become furious. If we had just delivered a nation of slaves from four hundred years of servitude and abuse, only to have them despise us and long to be enslaved again, we would not have offered to help them by giving them an angel, unless it was a fallen angel who would torment them. But not God! He is not like us. He is kind. He is benevolent. He is gracious.

Why did it come to this? Why did God want to withdraw His presence and send an angel instead? What did Israel do? They forsook and blasphemed God! They created a golden calf; they got drunk; they took off their clothes and indulged themselves in debauchery. They threw off all thoughts of the God who delivered them and danced around the golden calf proclaiming that this was the god who delivered them from the house of bondage in Egypt. Honestly, what would you have done with such a people? The Lord wanted to give them an angel.

The Lord explained to Moses that if His presence went with Israel, He would end up destroying them because of their constant wickedness. But Moses interceded. Moses knew the Name of God. He knew that God was merciful and gracious, that the Lord is kind and forgives sin. Moses appealed to God on the basis of His divine nature. He interceded for the glory and reputation of God. Moses refused to go anywhere without the presence of God.

Now, wait before you think you would have acted as Moses did. I wonder how many of us would have chosen the angel. God promised the angel would guarantee five things:

1. *He would give them entrance into the promise.*
2. *He would assure them of the full inheritance of Abraham.*
3. *He would perform supernatural wonders and miracles.*
4. *He would deliver them from their enemies.*
5. *He would give them prosperity.*

Would you be content with an angel? Would that be enough for you? I could only imagine the people responding to the Lord, "Really! Thank you, Lord. That is awesome. That would be so wonderful!" Could you imagine how excited many pastors and churches would be to have this promise of an angel. An angel who would give them miracles, deliver them from enemies, give them wealth, fulfill promises. Could you imagine the evangelism? The people in church would be so excited. They would be telling everybody at work, at home, in the neighborhood, "Oh, you just have to come to church; we have an angel there. You really need to come and see this. He works miracles and fights for us." The church would be packed. They would be much more excited about an angel instead of God. Rarely do Christians appeal to their friends to come to church because God is there. As a matter of fact, many hardly ever get excited about church or God. Many hardly ever invite their friends to come and see God. So, an angel would be an awesome deal.

But not for Moses! And hopefully not for you reading this. Moses wanted God and would settle for nothing less. Praise God! Moses wanted

the presence of the Lord. He knew there were things the angel could never give them. The angel could not give them rest. The angel could not give them grace. The angel could not make them holy. Only God can give rest, grace, and holiness. God's presence is the proof that we have found grace with God.

"And he said, My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest. And he said unto him, If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence. 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 (holy), I and thy people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth" (Exodus 33:14-16).

I CHOOSE GOD

Moses knew it and history proved it; nothing can take the place of the presence of God. Choosing an angel over God? I don't think so. I choose God. Just look what the Lord has done! What could possibly, who could possibly compare to the Lord? To whom would you liken Him?

"Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered ..." (Psalms 68:1). God rides upon the heavens. He is a Father to the fatherless. He breaks the chains of those in bondage.

It was God who went before Israel; just look what happened in His presence: Sinai was moved, the earth shook, the heavens bowed, the mountains trembled (Psalms 68). When Israel was brought out of her bondage, Judah was His sanctuary. Judah means praise. To this day, God inhabits praise. The sea saw Him and rolled up; the mountains moved. *"What ailed thee, O thou sea, that thou fleddest? Thou Jordan, that thou wast driven back? Ye mountains, that ye skipped like rams; and ye little hills, like lambs? Tremble, thou earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob; which turned the rock into a standing water, the flint into a fountain of waters" (Psalms 114:5-8).*

"MOSES KNEW IT AND HISTORY PROVED IT; NOTHING CAN TAKE THE PLACE OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD."

What brought the water out of the rock? The presence of God. I cannot comprehend life without God's presence, *"Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever ... it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord God ..." (Psalms 73:25-26, 28).*

I celebrate David's song of rest. I have come to experience this life-saving truth. God is a safe place. God is my safe place, my hiding place.

"The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? When the wicked, even my enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell. Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident. One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in His temple. For in the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion: in the secret of His tabernacle shall He hide me; He shall set me upon a rock. And now shall mine head be lifted up above mine enemies round about me: therefore will I offer in His tabernacle sacrifices of joy; I will sing, yea, I will sing praises unto the Lord. Hear, O Lord, when I cry with my voice: have mercy also upon me, and answer me. When Thou sadist, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto Thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek ... When my father and my mother forsake me, the Lord will take me up ... I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord" (Psalms 27).

DON'T LOOK FOR THE IMPOSSIBLE – LOOK FOR GOD

The impossible becomes possible in the presence of the Lord. You could tell when Jesus had passed through a Jewish village ... there were no sick people left! Wherever He is there is no problems with diseases, cancers, devils, storms, enemies, plagues, calamities, or grief. His presence is the answer to everything. It's His presence, it's just supernatural. Miracles happen in His presence; the elements bend to His will. There is no such word as impossible in God's dictionary. God's power, love and goodness transcend all matter. God is not just supernatural. But He is miraculous by nature. Everything about Him is miraculous, and so is everything He does.

If a man can but take hold of God, nothing shall be impossible. All Christians are not equal here. Spirituality alone counts here; shut the door no spectators are allowed; this is a secret place. The reason many believers do not prevail is because of composure. Composure in the presence of God is foreign to princes with God: they cried, they prayed in tongues, they took hold of the invisible presence, they conversed with the Someone no one else could hear.

What are you to do in the midst of uncertainty? Not much sense counseling a Christian who has not prayed about their trouble. Who knows what God might do to help such people if they would only cry out. How often have many spent their time talking and worrying while the Lord of the universe waited to be invited into the fray? All they had to do was praise, but they would not.

THE ANSWER IS IN GOD'S PRESENCE

The presence of God is the difference. It is God's presence that brings transformation and joy. God desires for the world to know those who have been in His presence. Moses was very concerned that people would not take him seriously. Why would Egypt listen to his demand to let a nation of slaves go free? How could he prove he was being sent by God?

Well, it mattered to God that Egypt and Israel knew that Moses had been with God. So God had Moses surrender his rod and that rod became the rod of God. Moses became the man of God. Why did this happen? Let the Lord tell us. God said to Moses, *"That they may believe that the Lord God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath appeared unto thee" (Exodus 4).*

This is the essence of the church. This is the value of our lives – we have been with God. There should be something supernatural about us. Our lives should be lived to make Jesus look great! We should not live as though Jesus is just a side interest. We should manifest to the watching world that our Jesus is the most exciting and worthy pursuit in all of life. That the joy of His presence transcends all other attainments. That the longing for heaven is only because Jesus is there.

YOU NEED TO REST

Jesus has been everything to me. He is my closest friend since I was a child. Everything I have, every hope I have is because of Him. His presence is my rest. Beloved, you must learn to rest in the presence of the Lord or the battle will wear you out. Prolonged hardships and relentless toil will give the enemy opportunity to develop strategies for your destruction. The enemy will take occasion of your weariness and emptiness to overwhelm you. No amount of sleep, nutrition, or entertainment can refresh a man from these conditions, only the presence of God; *"My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest" (Exodus 33:14).*

But just consider the successes of Satan against the saints as so many are burdened in bitterness, depression, and fear. In every regard, the demands of a man's life are answered in the Lord's presence. The abusive effects of man's emotions are all tamed in the presence of God and excited to their proper function. It is here, in God's presence where man can find an answer to his ANGER, INJUSTICE, and BITTERNESS. Even the body is ministered to by God, for in the presence of God is healing. Have you ever prayed for God to give you a season of rest from the enemy? He will if you ask, even if in the midst of a battle.

You must rest. At some point, a bowstring must be released and the tension alleviated. Likewise, you must be released from the pressure. There are no tricks to this. There are no alternative solutions. In the presence of the Lord is rest. Your survival depends on His presence. I am not simple saying, "Take a break." I am not calling for a vacation. I am saying, "Retreat to your refuge. Be healed before your Father!" It is time that you are released from the enemies, the fears, the threats, the fighting, and the strategies against you. I do not suppose these things just go away because we have God's presence. Oh, no! David had God's presence but he also had many wars. Rest is not the absence of calamity, enemy attacks, or peril – rest is God's presence. Daniel was in the Lions Den. What was he doing there? He was resting!