

Bethel

Prayer Meeting Addresses

Number 35 The Promise of God's Presence

Reading: Exodus 33. 12-23

12 And 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, 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 cleft 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.

Address

At this time, Moses the man of God felt an awful weight resting on his spirit. He had to lead God's people through the wilderness to the Promised Land. But now, because of their sin, their dreadful guilt, God said that He would no longer go with them. And Moses could not bear that! God said that He would send an angel, but no angel was enough for Moses. O the weight, the awfulness, the sorrow he felt! And he poured out his heart to God in prayer: "If Thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence." It was a prayer of complete helplessness; it was a prayer of complete dependence.

Beloved friends, I do not know how you feel, but O this prayer does suit me this evening. It is a solemn time when we come to the closing hours of the old year and when we think of tomorrow and next week and the coming months, the unknown way. Well, “If Thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence.” How *can* we face the future apart from the loving, gracious presence of the most high God? We do not know what lies before us – in the church of God, in the nation, in our families, personally. But we do know this: that “man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward.” We know there will be the trials, the difficulties the problems. And then some of us see the depths of sorrow lying before us.

“Deep waters cross life’s pathway;
The hedge of thorns is sharp.”

And however can we go on, and however can we venture into the new year, the unknown way, unless the Lord in His love and mercy goes with us to help us and to be with us and to uphold us and to support us?

“If Thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence.” Like Israel, like Moses, so undeserving, and yet this prayer of helplessness, this prayer of dependence. Some of you have new things before you. “Ye have not passed this way heretofore,” some of you. “If Thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence.” Some of you have new things. Some of you have decisions to take. Some of you have things you have never known before. Then what if death should face us? “If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence.” There is one thing here: a sacred sense of the value of the gracious presence of Almighty God. Now if we have that, then come what may, all must be well.

But, “If Thy presence go not with me, carry us no up hence.” And what a gracious answer Moses received, and really the Lord gave the answer before Moses prayed the prayer. What an answer! “And He said, My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.” Do not leave out those first three words; they are vital: “*And He said.*” That is the authority. *He* hath said, who is almighty. *He* hath said, who is gracious, merciful. *He* hath said, who is faithful that has promised. *He* hath said, who will never leave thee, never fail thee, never forsake thee. “And He said, My presence shall go with thee.” And, “What more can He say than to you He has said?” My presence to uphold; my presence to keep; My presence to bless; My presence to save; My presence to deliver. “My presence shall go with thee.” There are many, many uncertainties, but there is no uncertainty here.

“My presence shall go with thee.” My presence as almighty God; My presence as the Friend of sinners; My presence as the great Shepherd of the

sheep; My presence as the One who knows and understands and cares. And if the Lord's presence is with us (and He has promised it), then in love and mercy He will bear us in His arms and bring us safely through.

“If Thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence.” *“And He said, My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.”* And there is something beautiful about that promise, that the Lord will give rest. Now I take it here in the context literally that what Almighty God meant in this promise to Moses was rest in the Promised Land, that Israel would be brought safely there, that they would occupy that land; they would find an abiding place, a resting place there. I take it that is what the promise meant literally. And then spiritually it means that the Lord will bring all His people safely home to the heavenly Canaan and bless them with eternal rest there. “There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.”

“My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.” They had a pilgrimage before them. They had the wilderness before them. There were giants they had to encounter. At last, there was Jordan to be crossed. But, “My presence shall go with thee,” and because My presence shall go with thee, then you will be brought safely through it all, “stand every storm, and live at last,” and be brought safely into the Promised Land. O what a promise this! May we feel it this evening.

“And He said, My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.” But then just to think of this blessing of rest, that there is a resting place in Christ, “the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.” For those with sorrow, perplexity, there is a resting place in the will of God, who never made a mistake and who never will, who is “too wise to err and too good to be unkind.” For those burdened with sin and guilt, there is a resting place in the atonement, the merits of Jesus, His righteousness, His precious, sin-atoning blood. O that rest of faith in Christ! And then as you journey on in your pilgrimage, at times to find that resting place in the promises and in the covenant of grace and in the eternal safety of the people of God. That resting place: “The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms”; that resting place that all your needs will be richly supplied; that resting place that you will be blessed with strength sufficient for your day. “My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.” Whatever may come, whatever may not come, even though it be death itself, though it be severe affliction, “My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.” O to hear that voice: “Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” O to know the sweet realisation of living faith:

“I heard the voice of Jesus say,
‘Come unto Me and rest;
Lay down, thou weary one, lay down
Thy head upon My breast!’
I came to Jesus as I was,
Weary, and worn, and sad;
I found in Him a resting-place,
And He has made me glad.”

“My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.” But there was something special that Moses sought. He wanted to see God’s glory, and the Lord said, “I will make all My goodness” – all My goodness – “pass before thee.” Does that mean that the Lord’s goodness is His glory? O but it was this point: how can I see Thy glory and live? Now this is your resting place, beloved friends. Is there any place I can find rest? Is there any hiding place? Is there any refuge? “And the Lord said, Behold, there is a place by Me.” Do you believe it? “There is a place,” a place where a sinner can find rest, a refuge from the storm, a covert from the tempest, a hiding place for the new year, the unknown way. O, “There is a place by Me.” There is not a place anywhere else away from Me. “There is a place by Me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock: 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.” Beloved friends, that is your safety and that is your security for the new year.

“Within the clefts of His dear side,
There all His saints in safety dwell.
And what from Jesus shall divide?
Not all the rage of earth or hell.”

“My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.” “Behold, there is a place by Me, and ... I will put thee in a clift of the rock, and will cover thee with My hand.”

Beloved friends, may this blessing be yours and mine through mercy in the new year.

This address was given at Bethel Chapel, Luton, by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom, on New Year’s Eve, Monday, 31st December, 2007