

Teaching for 8-06-08

Why is Presence Important?

The newsletters in recent weeks have focused on various aspects of the Presence of God and how God was manifest in a special way in the midst of His people. Some might ask, “Why is this an important topic? Can’t we be satisfied with just reading God’s Word? Why is knowing and embracing the Presence of God so important?” Is it enough to be a diligent student of God’s Word and to be busy about trying to do good things for Him? Aren’t our city-reaching efforts and outreach programs sufficient? Why get into this area that seems to be mystical and controversial? Why is the pursuit of God’s Presence so important? These are all important questions for us to wrestle with.

It is Biblical and Historical

First, it is important to understand that this subject must be firmly rooted in the unchanging Word of God. What we are speaking of is not extra-biblical or unbiblical. As stated previously, the whole of Scripture makes known this theme of God in the midst of His people in a manifest, palpable way that is remarkable to all who are near it. History declares that this magnificent, all-powerful, manifest Presence of God has been a part of past revivals. Owen Murphy in his little booklet, *When God Stepped Down from Heaven*, writes of the Hebrides Revival, *Undoubtedly the outstanding feature of this spiritual awakening has been the deep consciousness of the Presence and Holiness of God so overwhelming at times that people were afraid to open their mouths lest they utter words that would bring them into the judgments of God. Sinner, overawed by the Divine Presence, would fall helplessly, crying for mercy, the shop became a pulpit, the home a sanctuary, and the heart an altar!* The manifest Presence of God is Biblical and historical.

Learning to Know Him

Pursuing the Presence of God is important because it is in His presence that we learn who He is. It was in God’s Presence that Moses not only received the Law, but saw God’s glory (Exodus 33: 21-13). It was in God’s Presence that Isaiah not only understood his own sinfulness, but caught the heart of God for others (Isaiah 6). It was in the Lord’s Presence that Job came to understand God’s greater purposes. It was in the Presence of God that David learned to depend upon the Lord’s faithfulness and help in times of trouble (Psalm 27). Pursuing God’s Presence is not meant to detract from the absolute and primary place of God’s Word, but it is in His Presence that His Word opens up in greater understanding and dimension. Of course we can understand this using our own personal experience with people we love. It is one thing to exchange letters with those we love. It is another thing to be with them interacting and fellowshiping in an intimate and meaningful way and growing in our love of them. The same holds true with our Lord. It is in His Presence that we discover His un-surpassing greatness, His unfathomable majesty, and the depth of His love.

Purifying The Church

The true, holy, manifest Presence of God will reveal sin, and bring conviction and purification to the people of God as well as the community. When Israel first stopped at Sinai, they were confronted with the awesome spectacle of God's glory on the mountain. Exodus 19 describes thunder and lightning, a thick cloud over the mountain, and a *very loud trumpet blast*. In verse 18 we see that *Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the Lord descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain trembled violently, and the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder*. Then in Exodus 20:20, as the people stayed at a distance from the mountain and asked Moses to speak for them, Moses explained to them, *Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning*. Abiding in God's Presence will cause us to fear God more than the pleasures of sin. We all know that forty days was all it took for Israel to lose that focus and sin with the golden calf. It is a warning to us that we too could lose our focus and enter into sin if we don't seek Him daily and walk in His Presence continuously.

God Leads

The end of Exodus gives us a clear picture of another purpose of God's Presence—to lead His people. *In all the travels of the Israelites, whenever the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle, they would set out; but if the cloud did not lift, they did not set out - until the day it lifted. So the cloud of the Lord was over the tabernacle by day, and the fire was in the cloud by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel during all their travels* (Exodus 40:36-38). It should be very significant to us in our day that Israel followed the Presence, not the other way around. The whole nation of Israel structured their daily life around the Presence. When the cloud lifted and moved, they moved. When it stopped, they set up camp and waited. Whether it was one day or weeks, every aspect of their lives was dependent upon and directed by the Presence of God in their midst. In our Western mindset, we have been taught to develop a plan, execute that plan, and then ask God to bless and follow along as we accomplish great deeds for Him. God longs to be invited to dwell with us, to consume our churches, and to transform our communities so that our devotion is only for Him. As we seek His Presence we will not be disappointed. *Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will **dwell** among them* (Exodus 25:8).