

Not Living Without God's Presence

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[0:00] The Bible begins with Genesis, and then Exodus.! We'll be looking at Exodus chapter 33.! Exodus chapter 33.

We'll be reading the first 17 verses.! When the people heard these distressing words, they began to mourn, and no one put on any ornaments.

For the Lord had said to Moses, Tell the Israelites, You are a stiff-necked people. If I were to go with you even for a moment, I might destroy you. Now take off your ornaments, and I will decide what to do with you.

And so the Israelites stripped off their ornaments at Mount Oreb. Now Moses used to take a tent and pitch it outside the camp some distance away, calling it the tent of meeting.

Anyone inquiring of the Lord would go up to the tent of meeting outside the camp. And whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people rose and stood at the entrances to their tents, watching Moses until he entered the tent.

[1:42] As Moses went into the tent, the pillar of cloud would come down and stay at the entrance, while the Lord spoke with Moses. Whenever the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance to the tent, they all stood and worshipped, each at the entrance to his tent.

The Lord would speak to Moses face to face as a man speaks with his friend. Then Moses would return to the camp, but his young aide Joshua, son of Nun, did not leave the tent.

Moses said to the Lord, You have been telling me, lead these people, but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. You have said, I know you by name, and you have found favor with me.

If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways, so I may know you and continue to find favor with you. Remember that this nation is your people. The Lord replied, My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.

Then Moses said to him, If your presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us?

[2:56] What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth? And the Lord said to Moses, I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you, and I know you by name.

Well, what is the presence of God worth to you? The presence of God in your life, how important is that to you?

Well, we're at the foot of Mount Sinai. 3,500 years ago, 2 to 3 million Israelites are camping there. After 400 years of slavery down in Egypt, God came with grace and power and delivered them out of Egypt, setting his people free, just as he had promised to their forefather Abraham so many years before.

Remember, it took 10 destructive plagues to make Pharaoh willing to let them go. After the 10th plague, he said, Okay, go.

And the people even encouraged them to go and gave them things, riches, to get out quickly, lest everyone be destroyed by their God.

[4:11] But then Pharaoh changed his mind, didn't he? Again, the 10th time, and he went after them to destroy them. And so God took Israel right through the Red Sea. And they passed through the sea on dry land with water piled on the left and on the right.

And when the Egyptian army tried to do the same, God threw them into confusion and then brought the whole water down upon them and drowned them in delivering his people Israel.

It wasn't long before Israel made it to their worship destination of Mount Sinai. That's where God had first met with Moses, in that burning bush.

And now he had the nation there at Mount Sinai. And God drew near in fire and smoke and the mountain trembling with the cloud and darkness as he came.

And there he audibly spoke the Ten Commandments in the hearing of all his people. Moses then went up on the mountain for 40 days to meet with God.

[5:19] And God carved with his own finger, the scriptures say, he carved the Ten Commandments into those two stone tablets and gave them to Moses. And when Moses came down from meeting with God, he finds the Israelites worshiping and dancing around this golden calf.

A blatant violation of the second commandment. To not make an idol in the form of anything. And so Moses, in a symbolic action, throws the two tablets to the ground and they break into pieces, showing that Israel had broken God's law.

And then he burned the golden calf in the fire. He ground it into powder, threw it on the water, and made the Israelites drink it. 3,000 Israelites were cut down by the swords of the Levites that God commanded to punish the 3,000 for their sin.

Moses was pleading with the Lord for the forgiveness of his people's sin. And God further struck the people with a plague because of the golden calf.

And that brings us to our text this morning, chapter 33, that was read for us. And the first verse just says, then, then, after all this has happened, then the Lord said to Moses, leave this place, you and the people you brought up out of Egypt, and go up to the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, I will give it to your descendants.

[6:53] I will send an angel before you and drive out the Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. Go up to the land flowing with milk and honey.

But, I will not go with you. Because you're a stiff-necked people, and I might destroy you on the way.

Now, there's a searching test in that situation that reveals the heart of any people, Moses, the Israelites, us included.

Suppose you had been slaves all your lives, miserably treated in a foreign land, and now you're set free and have the offer of an amazing homeland, a land flowing with milk and honey, dripping with blessing, when you've known nothing but misery for 400 years as a people.

And an angel of God promised to go with you to drive out the wicked inhabitants in that land that it might become yours, houses that you did not build, gardens and fields and vineyards that you did not plant, all yours for the taking.

[8:14] There's just one catch. I'm not going with you. I'm not going with you. You can have all the gifts, but without the giver.

Are you going? Are you in? And this is where Moses responds. It's one of his better days, one of his best moments, for he says to God in verse 15, I'm not interested.

If your presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. What would make a man say that in the face of what he's facing there in the desert compared to what he would have in a land flowing with milk and honey?

What would make a man say, if your presence doesn't go up, I'm not interested? Well, he knew the Lord, didn't he? He didn't just know about the Lord.

A lot of people know a lot about the Lord. They're in church every Sunday and they hear a lot of things about him. He knew the Lord. The scriptures tell us that the Lord spoke to him face to face as a man speaks with his friend.

[9:32] You've talked with your friends this week. That's how God spoke to Moses. And Moses would speak back to him, friend to friend. He knew the Lord.

And he's not about to give up this most precious treasure of communion with a present God. A God who is with him.

A God whose presence meant all the difference in his life and in his calling to lead the children of Israel. Without God, he's nothing. And he knows it. He says in verse 16, How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us?

What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?

Here's an important matter to be clear on.

What is it that makes the people of God uniquely different from all the other people on the planet?

What is it that makes the people of God special, unique, distinct, different from all the other people on the earth?

[10:50] Moses answers, It's God's presence with us. The Lord Almighty is with us. An ever-present help in trouble. He dwells with us.

And we who are his New Testament temple, he dwells in us by his Holy Spirit. And he's promised, I will never leave you nor forsake you. I will be with you to the end of the age.

We have his presence, and that's the jewel in the crown of the Christian life. There's one thing that you can't go without in the Christian life.

It's the presence of God. That's what makes you different. It's the greatest gift of all. The giver himself, having him with us.

Take him away, we're nothing and can do nothing. The Lord's presence had been the difference maker in Moses' life. He experienced it at the call.

[11:50] The call of Moses there at the burning bush when God appeared to him and spoke to him out of the burning bush and said to Moses, Go, I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.

But Moses said to the Lord, Who am I? Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt? And God says, I will be with you.

It's not who you are, it's who's with you, Moses. Who am I? I will be with you. And so Moses went, counting on God's presence with him and finding that he made all the difference for everything that he was called to do in his task of leading the Israelites.

God's presence with them made all the difference during the plagues that they lived through in Egypt, didn't he? Remember the plague of flies? I'm going to send swarms of flies on you and your people, he says to Pharaoh.

Your houses will be full of them and the ground will be covered with flies. Kids, would you like to walk on flies? Just a carpet of flies in your bed and on the ground and in your houses.

[13:11] That's the plague on Egypt. But on that day I will deal differently with the land of Goshen where my people live. No swarms of flies will be there so that you will know that I, the Lord, am in this land.

I'm here with my people and I will make a distinction between my people and your people. God, how will the people know that there's any distinction how will they know that you're with us and that there's any difference between you and us if you don't go with us?

And he made all the difference. As God was there with his people there were no flies where God was. Then there was the plague on the livestock and all the livestock of the Egyptians died but not one animal belonging to the Israelites died because the Lord made a distinction between them.

The plague of darkness when for three days there was total darkness that covered Egypt. You couldn't see anything and so nobody left their home. They couldn't see.

Yet all the Israelites had light in the places where they lived. And then that last night the final plague at midnight and there was loud wailing in Egypt as every firstborn son in Egypt was found dead in the middle of the night.

[14:36] But among the Israelites not a dog barked. Don't you love that? Not a dog barked. Talk about protection. The Lord was there making a distinction.

His presence with his people. And this is what Moses is being asked to give up for what? For the promised land? I'm not interested Lord.

If you don't go with us don't send us up. As they left Egypt God was with his people. He was with them in the pillar of cloud wasn't he?

It was the cloud of God's presence and his presence made all the difference as they left Egypt that night. And they got to the Red Sea. And when they came to the Red Sea and the Israelites were pursuing them the cloud moved from in front of them leading them and it went behind them and came between them and the Egyptians.

God's presence separating them. And throughout the night the cloud brought darkness to the one side and light to the other. So neither went near each other all night long.

[15:51] The Lord was with them. His presence with them. And so once they had all got through the sea his people had gone through the sea he closed it up on the Egyptians.

He delivered his people. And then on their little short journey into the desert to come to Mount Sinai the Lord himself was the difference between starving and eating.

He provided manna bread in the desert out of heaven. He was the difference between drinking and dying of thirst more than once. He was the difference between scorching sun and shading heat or

shading soothing heat and can I start over?

He was the difference between the scorching sun and the soothing shade because the cloud was a shade over them in the desert. He was the difference between wandering around lost in the desert and being led as his presence went before them with them.

He was the great difference maker and Moses treasured him more than a home in the promised land. If your presence does not go up with us do not send us up from here.

[17:08] Fifteen hundred years later this same God came to us via the birth of the Virgin. God the eternal son became a man who was called Emmanuel which being interpreted is God with us.

God is with us. He's with us in Jesus Christ. What's his presence worth to you dear believer? Oh it's worth everything.

Jesus is everything to me to go into every day to rise to every day and to step into my day not alone but Jesus with me God with me to go to school to go to work to go into new situations scary situations new places never alone God with us.

We go to our duties our ministries our service to others God is with us equipping us. We go into every trial every trouble every affliction and we're not alone but he's with us.

We go into this tempting world that has a devil that wants to damn us with himself and we're never alone because God is with us and we lie down to sleep at night and he's still with us and when I awake I am still with him.

[18:52] He's that close to us always with us his spirit dwelling in us like he dwelt in the holy of holies in the tabernacle in the temple you dear child of God are his temple he's with you he's in you.

believers in Jesus this is what distinguishes us this is what makes us different from any other people it's not who we are but whose we are it's not me but who's with me God himself is with us let us now adore him and with awe appear before him and so being with us we have his word and he speaks to us as one to his friend directly to us here and being with us we have his ear that we can speak into and he listens to us as to his friend and we have his almighty arm that acts on our behalf just as it acted on behalf of Moses and his people of old we have all of his attributes and they're enlisted for us his love his faithfulness his grace his wrath his holiness it's all for us and he does all of this not from afar but as a

God who is with us and then he's with us as we go to our deathbeds they're coming they're coming for us and they may come sooner than we realize Friday morning the little boy at the end of our street was suddenly snatched from this earth into eternity in a car accident but as we go to our deathbeds believers we go not alone but God with us what's it worth to know that the Lord Jesus your good shepherd will himself personally lead you through the valley of the shadow of death and into his eternal home forever what's that worth to you presence of Christ with you David says I will fear no evil for thou art with me and then on to the last judgment and even there we're not alone but our Lord is still with us still with us to plead his own blood as the reason for our acceptance in heaven our Lord with us to claim us as his blood bought children to say to his father father here am I and the children you have given me these are the ones I lived a perfect life for these are the ones I shed my blood and died for and rose again for and now live for they are mine his presence with us making all the difference there even as he has every day of our Christian lives here and then to dwell in the house of the Lord forever with him what a God we have not a God who is far off but the holy one who is present with his people no wonder

Moses was not willing to settle for the promised land without God to settle for the promised land without the promiser no thanks he wants nothing to do with God's gifts without God's presence because what after all is the promised land if God is not with us it's just more things the things that cannot satisfy us we were made for God we were made for fellowship with him there is nothing in this earth below that can satisfy our greatest need for God for a redeemer Jesus to make us right with God no gift of God can be rightly enjoyed without enjoying God the giver of it think of all the gifts in your life we were encouraged with that as we rejoice in his presence for all the things he's given us you see what we did this morning we enjoyed the gifts along with the giver we rejoice before the

[23:36] Lord for all these things we enjoyed him in the enjoyment of all these things that we've had this past week and so there is an enjoyment of the giver and without that we don't rightly enjoy any of his gifts that's true of his gifts in this life and it's true of his gifts in heaven itself the final promised land if you could have heaven without God would you be fine with that that's what was being offered to Moses and the people heaven but I'm not going to be there that'd be a hollow

heaven wouldn't it empty shell the ultimate letdown heaven without him it's like sunshine without the sun it's impossible it's like an inheritance without the greatest treasure of all that would be more like hell than heaven if you remember the description Paul gives of hell as being shut out from the presence of the

Lord banished from him whose presence is fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore shut out from the presence of him whom to know is life eternal who's the source and giver of every blessing then to be without him will be to be left without anything good not one drop of mercy to be shut off from the presence of the Lord no according to the Bible God's people are headed for an eternity in God's presence Revelation 21:3 we memorized it a few weeks back and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying now the dwelling of God is with men and he will live with them they will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God this is the glory of heaven God with us even in a deeper a more expansive sense than what we enjoy now by his spirit then we will see

God in Jesus Christ face to face Jesus will be what makes it heaven for me his presence remember how he prayed that night before he was crucified father I want those you have given me to be with me where I am and to see my glory the glory you've given me because you love me before the creation of the world what is heaven it's being with the Lord Jesus and seeing his glory we're going to see the king in his beauty that's what David lived for Psalm 27 for one thing I ask of the Lord this is what I seek after that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life and gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and seek him in his temple this is what made death more preferable than life for the apostle Paul I desire to depart and to be with Christ which is better by far it's his presence more direct more immediate face to face the bodily

Christ that makes death gain for the believer no wonder Moses objects when God says go on up y'all go on up to the promised land but I'm not coming with you if your presence does not go with us do not send us up from here you cannot fathom going anywhere without God and when we think what he been through we can understand that can't we he's been everywhere he's been floating in a basket among the bulrushes and crocodiles in the Nile and he's not ready to go anywhere without his God he's been on the back side of a wilderness wondering what am I to do with my life and God appears to him and tells him he doesn't want to go anywhere!

I need thy presence every passing hour I don't want to move without you I don't want to go anywhere even if it is flowing with milk and honey nothing is worth having without you no created angel can make up for your absence you said you are going to send an angel to go with us and help us and drive no created angel can make up for your absence do you see something of the heartbeat of Moses the man who knew God right greatly valued God's presence in his life above everything else and what Moses wanted and pleaded for God gave him he says in verse 14 my presence will go up with you amazing thing!

[29:13] that's how we can go through life arm in arm with Jesus united to Christ his spirit in us and not be destroyed when we sin why because we have an advocate with the father who's ever pleading for us forgive him he's mine I died for his sins pleading I was damned for her he says don't destroy her she's mine redeemed one who is a pardoning God like thee and who has grace so rich and free and so here's Moses and he's interceding for these stiff neck people before God as their mediator he's the go between and God says oh if I just take a step with these people they're going to be gone because of my wrath against sin Moses pleads for mercy based upon the coming

Christ do you know Jesus is the one who fulfills Moses as the mediator Jesus is the only mediator between God and men here's the holy God and sinful men here we are we're banished from God's presence put out shut out from the presence of the Lord forever and ever why because of our sin and our sin separates us from God and here comes Jesus as the mediator of his people and he lives a perfect life for his people and he dies and he's damned for his people and all all in order to bring us to God to get sin out of the way that separated us and to bring us to God for Christ died for sins once for all the just for the unjust to bring us to God that's the work of the mediator to bring us to him is that your trust this morning if so then that's why you enjoy God's presence in your life all the way along the journey to the promised land so

Moses valued God's presence above all else do you how much do you treasure the presence of God in your life having him always with you well that could be measured in part by your communion with him throughout your day do you treasure the present of God well how often does he hear from you in the course of a day how often are you checking in and talking with him and not just living for him but living with him the shared life where he's the first one you go with your problems and with

your joys you share life with him you abide!

in him you know it's possible to be so busy for him that we neglect him I want to confess that it's possible to be a preacher so busy serving him that we neglect him there's a difference Robert Murray McShane said there's no labor for the king's service that will make up for neglect of the king himself and ouch does that hurt and I'm stopped in the midst of my preparations to preach and I must go and meet with my king he says John what is all of this if it keeps you from me my presence being enjoyed and laid hold of and everything else set aside my greatest privilege is to belong to you to pour out my worship there before him do we prize him do we prize his presence as our chief treasure what difference practically speaking would it make in your day if

God was not with you would you notice would you miss him when how much are we not sadly too often satisfied to live without the giver as long as we've got his gifts you remember the ten lepers that Jesus healed as they were going on their way to show themselves to the priest they realized they were healed from their their leprosy a life threatening disease that deformed them and cut them off from society and they suddenly healed all of them received the healing but only one went back to Jesus to worship to bow down to praise the giver the rest were happy to have the gift and cared not for the giver!

[34 : 13] how sadly that we too often are like the nine enjoying God's gifts every day but are we found at his feet treasuring our greatest gift him with us let God's gifts lead you to him every one of them as you receive them let them lead you to him that's why they're given to you all his blessings in my life are meant to lead me straight to him to enjoy fellowship with him to rejoice before the Lord as we've done this morning to praise and thank and worship him and to enjoy him along with his gifts!

Moses says we don't want the gifts if we can't have the giver with us and you know God's presence with him the same response can be seen in other believers indeed it's a mark of spiritual health and I challenge you as I am challenged with it myself how healthy is your spirit how healthy is your relationship to God how much do you treasure the presence of God the giver above and with his gifts well it's the one who counts the Lord's presence as his great delight and makes much of his presence throughout the day Bernard of Clara captures the sentiment writing nearly a thousand years ago he says from the best bliss this earth imparts we turn unfilled to thee again isn't that beautiful we've been in the world all week long we've been experiencing the best bliss that this earth imparts and we come unfilled to thee again

I've been spending the day hours eight hours in the world and maybe it was full of good things fun things pleasurable things but Lord before I go out tonight to sleep I want to say I come back to you unfilled there's nothing out there that fills me I want you there's Peter in John chapter six and Jesus has just preached a crowd thinning sermon he's told them they're so sinful that unless God draws them they will never believe on him and yet they must believe on him because they must have the bread of life that he is or they will not have life any more than a man can live without food they need him for eternal life and yet are too sinful to want him and they're offended at his preaching and they voted with their feet and John tells us it was a watershed moment in the public ministry of Jesus from and it was then that Jesus turned to the twelve and asked you to not want to leave also do you and as often it was Peter who opened his mouth first for the rest and this time he got it right Lord to whom shall we go for you have the words of eternal life and we know and believe that you are the holy one of God you going to leave too they're off to their pleasures they're off to their earth to fill their cup you going to leave where could we go Lord there's no place else to go in the whole earth you alone have what we need you yourself are the bread of life you yourself are the water the river of the water of life you yourself have words of eternal!

whereby we live because we know you are the holy one of God you see there really is nowhere else to go for this is eternal life to know the only true God in Jesus Christ whom thou has sent whom he has sent and then there's Thomas in John chapter 11 often Thomas gets the bad rap doesn't he of being a doubting Thomas because he was unbelieving!

[38 : 41] Jesus resurrection but he's also full of devotion to Jesus as he shows up in John 11 where Jesus got word that his friend Lazarus was sick and he stayed where he was for two more days until his friend died and then he said to his disciples let us go back to Judea but Rabbi they said a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you and yet you're going back there that's right and then it was Thomas this time who spoke up and said to the rest of the disciples let us go that we may die with him what does the presence mean to you Thomas I'd rather die with him than live

without him let's go I don't want to live without you the Lord Jesus meant that much that he could not envision life without him can you can you envision life without

Jesus can you envision one day of your life without the Lord Jesus with you there's a good question to reveal our hearts if your presence go not up with us do not send us up from here are you content to live without Jesus Christ in your life you know the unconverted are saying yes every day I am content to live my life without Jesus Christ to live without God in his pride the wicked does not seek him in all his thoughts there's no room for God Brownlow North was an evangelistic preacher throughout the British Isles the middle of the 1800 he was used by God to call many to faith and repentance he was a simple straight shooting kind of guy but he lived his first 44 years of life without

God and happy to live it that way he was a strong man he was an outdoorsman he loved hunting with his dogs he loved to go fishing he loved socializing with people he filled up his life with as many pleasures as he could doing what he pleased his biographer writes he forgot God days without number and wished that God would forget him no room room for God in all his thoughts no time for God in his schedule he was having too much fun enjoying what God's gifts but not God the giver and that in itself was his great sin just being content to live without God I wonder if that's not the condition of some here this morning that they're just content maybe you're not the worst guy on the planet you're not robbing banks you're not killing people you're not stealing but you are content to live your life without

God don't need God don't need God don't need Christ in my life that's a crutch for weak people going through hard times don't need God don't need your next breath it's in his hand don't need food to stay alive he gives it don't need a healthy body to process that food you know there's a lot of people with a lot of food but they still die because they don't have a body that can process the food don't need health that's God's gift don't need a savior on the day of judgment to stand and to show his righteousness you're ready to stand on your own and your own good deeds and say I think I'm good enough God oh we all need him some don't know they need him do you know that's one way you can know that

Satan has blinded your eyes if you don't think you need God now every day you don't think you need Jesus the God of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the glory of the gospel of Jesus Christ they can't see his beauty how he perfectly meets the needs of a sinner and if you live another day without Jesus it proves you're still a blind man you know Satan's kingdom only flourishes as long as he keeps!

[43:41] He's lost you so he's keeping you in the dark he's keeping you distracted with other things he's not letting you think about God and judgment and Christ and sin and hell he's blinding your eyes don't be the dupe of the devil come to Jesus find him the willing ready savior that he is and find him to be that friend that sticks closer than a brother all the way through life his presence with us and all the way through death and the day of judgment and for all eternity the presence of Christ it's all grace it's all grace we all were banished from his presence and it's because Jesus was abandoned from God's presence on Calvary crying out my God my God why have you abandoned me?

because he was abandoned all who put their trust in him will never be abandoned but will know forever that glorious reality of God with us God for us blessed be his name trust in this savior and you'll come to know him to be of such a treasure that you'll understand exactly why Moses said if you're not going with us I'm not interested in going anywhere let's pray oh God we confess how blind we were some of us lived our first ten years without you blind to your glory blind to our need of Jesus of how he wanted to enrich us forever with his presence and with his salvation some of us lived our first twenty years thirty years forty fifty years and even more without you we confess it is our sin that we would be content to live one day without the all glorious creating sustaining redeeming Lord Jesus and we we marvel that your grace still sought us and sought us when we were not seeking you and called us to yourself mightily drew us and opened our eyes to see our greatest need is Jesus drew us to him thank you Lord for that great miracle in our lives we ask you to open up other blinded eyes and show them the Lord Jesus for who he is and draw them to faith in him we thank you

Lord for the way that you have made the difference in our lives indeed in every day that we just live this week thank you that you are the difference even this day as we worship here you are with us by your spirit send us on our way rejoicing in you counting all things but loss compared to knowing you

and having you having your presence with us we love you we thank you for loving us first when we were sinners without strength and enemies at that blessed be your name we pray through Christ amen