

The Lord in Our Midst - Or Not

Harmony M.B.C., November 27, 2011

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Exodus 33:1 And the LORD said unto Moses, Depart, *and* go up hence, thou and the people which thou hast brought up out of the land of Egypt, unto the land which I sware unto Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying, Unto thy seed will I give it:

Exodus 33:2 And I will send an angel before thee; and I will drive out the Canaanite, the Amorite, and the Hittite, and the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite:

Exodus 33:3 Unto a land flowing with milk and honey: for I will not go up in the midst of thee; for thou *art* a stiffnecked people: lest I consume thee in the way.

We have from the very mouth of Jesus Christ, a sure promise that He will be with us as a church until the end of the age. We as a church can always depend on that, as long as we can count ourselves as a true church. As long as we seek and follow the leadership of the Holy Spirit which He sent to empower and guide us, we can know that He is with us.

This same promise is also given to each of us as believers. We can know that Christ is with us when we are sure in our hearts that we are led and indwelt by the Spirit of God (**Rom. 8:14; 1John 3:24**). And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us). This does not mean that when we don't feel this that He is gone...only that we have lost sight of His presence with us. His promise as God is more sure than our feelings about it. The one (our feelings about the Lord's presence) is about where we are spiritually; while the other (His promise) is founded on the absolute truth of a God who cannot lie.

So, while we have that assurance of faith, churches and believers individually have times in their lives when the Lord is distant...He is not in our midst as He may have been in the past. When this happens, as a church, we find it hard to put forth concerted effort to fulfill the Great Commission. We leave the Great Commission work to our missionaries, or the pastor, or both. As believers we find it hard to think about spiritual things, or to be more spiritually minded. We sometimes feel like we are frozen in place and time. Our spiritual things are barely alive, and we feel almost spiritually dead. At the least, we realize that our spiritual life is far from what it may have once been, and we long for it to be better. We should mourn our poor spiritual health.

This condition happened to the children of Israel in our text. They are in a very degraded spiritual state. God has hidden His glory from them, and they know it. They realize things are not right. This is what we want to think about today, and look at the parallels to our own church, and our own lives, in this account.

I. To understand what has happened here, we need to look at some past events

- Go to **Exodus 32:1-7**- Israel had sinned a great sin(almost before they were out of sight of the Red Sea; the distance from Camden to Murray).
- This idolatry was about more than just making a golden calf, and calling it their god
 - It was about making something else preeminent in their lives besides the Mighty God

- This would be like claiming the Lord is the One you trust in, and the one you serve, then studying psychology for your answers to emotional problems; or laying out of church to go to a ball game, or to the lake, or to your favorite recreation, or to a family event.
- ▶ It was about depending on human inventions
 - This would be like claiming the Lord is whom you trust in, then when trouble comes, you ask your lawyer or your doctor to solve the problem (proper procedure: ask God to show His power in bringing a solution, THEN talk to your lawyer or doctor)
- ▶ It was about expressing adoration or reverence, or dedication or love to something to the exclusion of the Lord Jesus Christ
 - This would be like making your job first in your life, and the Lord second or third; or like even making your family first in your life; or any other of a dozen possible false gods (first)
- ▶ It is about expending one's energies, or focusing one's attention on something that results in detracting from energy and attention paid to Almighty God
 - This would be like working in such a way that you are too tired to worship the Lord, or just couldn't make it to worship services because you were working; or working in such a way that you never had time to do any work for the Lord.
- I have highlighted these facts about Israel's behavior, because this is the very thing for which God told them that they need not expect His personal glory and personal divine presence to be in their midst as they went up to Canaan, and when they got to Canaan.
- I want to remark here that in the biblical record about the tabernacle being in the midst of the camp of Israel is not found after this time. Also, His being in the midst of the tabernacle in any supernatural way never happened again when they got to Canaan (from the book of Joshua, through the record of the Kings; until Solomon built the temple (this fact will be the starting point for our message this evening on bringing back the personal presence of the Lord into our lives).

II. Now, notice the results of them getting in this condition

- On the surface, things look pretty good for them:
 - ▶ v. 1 - They were going to receive the promised land
 - ▶ v. 2 - They were going to overcome the enemies of the land
 - ▶ v. 3 - They were going to receive the bounty of the land
 - ▶ v. 2 - They were even going to be preceded by the angel of God as they went up to Canaan
 - ▶ v. 3 - BUT - God Himself would not go up in the midst of them
- This all seems almost contradictory, doesn't it? But let's look closer at it:
 - ▶ (See v. 1) - If your heart is right about your relationship with the Lord, is life being made easier and more settled for you worth as much if it is a blessing of God because He is honoring your parents or grandparents?
 - ▶ (See v. 2) - How much can you appreciate the Lord keeping your spiritual and physical enemies at bay if you are not in a spiritual condition to recognize what a benefit it is?
 - ▶ (See v. 3, phrase 1) - What good is it to have all the milk and honey if the heart is not in a condition to feed on the things of the Lord...spiritual things
 - Have you ever watched kids whose mama cooks their favorite dish, and they get sick

- just then and can't even eat it?
- ▶ (See v. 2, phrase 1, and v. 7, this chapter) - How personal does it feel to know that angels keep watch over your life, but the Lord keeps Himself at a distance from you because of your condition

III. Last, let's notice the attitude and response of Israel to this sad situation

- (v.4) - They were saddened and their excitement was suppressed by the fact
 - ▶ The Lord's people don't look or act very enthused, very excited, very positive when they know the Lord's personal presence is not with them
 - ▶ Even hardened children of God are affected when the reality of His disapproval comes home to them
 - ▶ The word "mourned" is not a word that is used very often in association with rebellious children of God; but it is here
 - Mourning can go a long way toward mending a man toward his Lord
 - ▶ (vv. 7-10) - They had a yearning for things to be like they were
 - ▶ (vv. 13-15) - Moses as their spiritual leader saw the heart of the matter
- Regardless of the spiritual condition of the Lord's people, His ministers will still plead on their behalf
- The Lord's ministers (and hopefully God's people in general) will see and understand the main thing about living the life of a believer, and the critical element for the church (v. 15, "if thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence").
 - ▶ NOTE: Moses did not plead for God to go up "in their midst," (which was the very thing the Lord had said He was not going to do) but only that His presence go up with them.
 - ▶ We really should want the Lord in our midst
 - If he isn't we might as well get ready for mediocrity in spiritual things
 - We can have all the temporal blessings that the Lord will bestow upon us, but without Him in our midst, the milk and honey will be a poor substitute
 - The Lord's people can't help but be in a kind of spiritual sorrow if the Lord is not in their midst
 - Since our Lord promised that where two or three are gathered together in His name, He is there in the midst of them, what excuse do we have for not making it so?
 - We'll learn more about this in tonight's message