

Teaching for 7-2-08

Presence over Programs

The book of Exodus is a pivotal book in a number of ways. It is the heart of God's covenant relationship with Israel in the Old Testament. It is the foreshadowing of Jesus, the Emmanuel, who would "tabernacle" among us (John 1:14). The heart of the book of Exodus is the revelation of God's Presence among His people. Twice in Exodus God gives Moses the plans and purpose for the tabernacle—once in chapters 25–31 and again in chapters 34–40. In both cases the central truth of the tabernacle was not in all the intricate details and plans nor was it about building a spectacular place to hold services for God. The foremost and central truth of the tabernacle was that it was a place for the Presence of God among His people.

It's All About Presence

God makes this clear to Moses in Exodus 25:8: *Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you.* The Lord's first comment about the tabernacle was that it would be a place for God to dwell among His people. As Exodus concludes, and all the work of preparation is completed, the ultimate purpose is fulfilled: *Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud had settled upon it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle* (Exodus 40:34-35). But the amazing amount of labor and cost that went into constructing the tabernacle would mean nothing without the Presence. The point of the tabernacle was not to keep the priests busy with their duties, making sacrifices, or even keeping the smoke of incense rising day and night to the Lord. None of these meant anything unless they were under the glory of God's Presence.

Moses' Plead for the Presence

Moses understood how important the element of God's Presence was. When the hearts of the people were turned away from the Lord, the promise of God's presence in their midst was withdrawn in Chapter 32. In their condition of sin, God states that His Presence, even for a moment, would destroy them (Exodus 33:5). Moses' pleadings with the Lord were not just for forgiveness and mercy but for the Presence. Without the Presence of the Lord in the midst of His people, all of the plans, the tabernacle, and the promises, meant nothing—they were meaningless. It was all wrapped up in the reality of God's Presence with His people. Moses' pleadings were not simply for the people, but also for himself. He, as a leader, needed to have the assurance of God's Presence, and he wanted to personally know God's character and ways. The Presence of God was of ultimate importance to Moses, as we see in Exodus 34: 29-35.

Presence Today?

We don't hear much about His Presence in today's Christianity. There is much spoken and written about plans, about tabernacles, and about priestly duties. There is much that draws our attention to the wonderful details of our meeting places and the symbolism of our plans and even

our worship. But the unmistakable reality of the manifest Presence of God in the midst of His people seems to be something that we have lost a hunger for. We, like the Israelites of old, can easily be satisfied with substitutes. These substitutes gratify our immediate need *for something*, but our “golden calves” are a horrible and ugly substitute for the delight of having the Presence of a holy and living God in our midst, even for a moment. We have lost the longing for the real, tangible, life changing Presence of God and have contented ourselves with programs, glamour, and performance instead.

Let's Plead Today

Do we long to taste the manifest Presence of God in our lives, in our churches, and in our communities? Do we want to be like Moses who settled for no substitutes or shortcuts? Moses was satisfied with nothing less than all of God. God longs, delights, and intends to release His manifest glory in the midst of His people. It is the theme of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation. We do not have to wait until “the end of the book” to experience His Presence, but we must make seeking Him our first priority above programs and human endeavors. How about you? Are you so hungry for His Presence that you, like Moses, will be satisfied with nothing less than all of God and all else pales in comparison? If so, ask the Lord to give you a heart like David's when he said in Psalm 63:1-2 *Oh God, you are my God, earnestly I seek You, my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you in a dry and weary land where there is no water. I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory.*