

Exodus: What We Mean When We Say God
Part 16: “God’s Presence is Essential”
Text: Exodus 33:1-23

By Pastor Ben Froese

I. Where is God?

Some theologians suggest we can think of three different senses of God’s presence.

1. God is everywhere (Psalm 139:7-8)
2. God is in heaven (Matthew 6:9)
3. God’s special manifest presence among his people (In the tabernacle, in the temple, in Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, etc.)

In Exodus 25-31, we see that God’s special manifest presence was to dwell among his people in the tabernacle.

II. God’s Manifest Presence Lost?

After the idol worship of Exodus 32, it seems that perhaps God will no longer dwell with his people.

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.’² I will send an angel before you and drive out the Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites.³ Go up to the land flowing with milk and honey. But I will not go with you, because you are a stiff-necked people, and I might destroy you on the way.” (Exodus 33:1-3)

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 to the tent of meeting outside the camp. (Exodus 33:7)

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? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?” (Exodus 33:15-16)

III. God’s Presence is Essential

Without God’s presence, “there will be no special treasure, no kingdom of priests, no holy nation, no Yahweh being their God, no covenant, no Ark, no Tabernacle, no Altar, no cloud of

Glory... [The people of Israel] are suddenly in danger of becoming a people with no identity at all, a non-people and a non-group fragmented by the centrifugal force of selfish ambition and left without hope..." (John I. Durham)

God's presence is essential for us as God's people today as well.

1. God's presence is essential for our participation in God's mission (Acts 1:8)
2. God's presence is essential for our ongoing communion with him (Ephesians 2:18)
3. God's presence is essential for our growth in character (Galatians 5:22-23)
4. God's presence is essential for us to know that we are his (Ephesians 1:13; Romans 8:16)

IV. Knowing God's Presence

"God comes where he's wanted." (Jon Tyson)

"To say that "I want to feel close to God" is somehow separate from "I want to embody God's instruction" seems out of whack with the whole reason for God's presence as the Holy Spirit."
(Dru Johnson)

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." Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory." (Exodus 33:17-18)

V. In Part Now, One Day Fully

God's response to Moses' request is that Moses cannot see his face, but only his back.
(Exodus 33:20, 23)

God is the one who chooses how much of Himself to reveal to us and when.

One day we get to know Him fully and see Him face to face
(1 Corinthians 13:12; Revelation 22:3-4)

Life Group Discussion and Reflection Questions

Open Up

What are the first thoughts that come to your mind when you hear the words, “the presence of God”?

Dig In

1. Read through the text, **Exodus 33:1-23**. What are some things that first stand out to you or raise questions for you?
2. In what ways do you think Moses might be considered an example for us to follow?
3. How would you describe the difference God’s presence has made in your life? What difference does the presence of God make in our church?
4. Reflect on this quote from Dru Johnson: “To say that “I want to feel close to God” is somehow separate from “I want to embody God’s instruction” seems out of whack with the whole reason for God’s presence as the Holy Spirit.” What are your thoughts about this statement? Are there times when we want to feel close to God but may not want to be obedient to him?
5. What are some things we can do in our lives now to carve out a space to know God’s presence more deeply?

Prayer

Take some time to pray! Perhaps use Moses’ prayer as a template and pray that as a group you would be a people who want God.