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The Epiphany of God's Presence

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TEXT: Exodus 33:14-17 (NIV)

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? 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."

When my brother and I were younger, we shared a room, a bedroom in the basement of our farmhouse here in Iowa. And I can still remember those mornings waking up there when it was still pitch dark outside and my father had gone out to do the chores. And we had chores that we were commissioned to be a part of in the morning, and we would lay in bed after dad went out, and you knew there was a time when he would come back into the house and it was time for us to go out. And I can still sense that sound of that door opening when dad came back into the mud room and his presence was made known, and he would open that door and yell down the steps to us, "Boys, it's time to get up. It's time for chores."

You know, the presence of someone makes a difference and you can sometimes feel it. The presence of someone in a room is shaping of the room to the tone of things – the atmosphere of things. And presence is a state or fact of someone or something existing occurring, being present in a place or in a time. And a presence doesn't have to be seen

to be felt. It can be unseen but still felt. You know, we're looking at epiphanies in the scripture: revelations, manifestations, made known to us by God himself through the work of his spirit in the penning of the Bible. And as we look at these epiphanies, we hope that you're encouraged and that you meditate on these and let them change your lives.

I want to look today at the epiphany of God's presence: Emanuel. Of course, at Christmas that we just came through, we're celebrating the fact that God came to us in the form of a child, Emmanuel, God with us, the savior born of a virgin, born into the world. But the epiphany of God's presence is broader than the time of the coming of Christ. There's much more to the presence of God in our world than just that period in history when Jesus was with us. These life-changing truths revealed to us in the scripture about the presence of God are encouraging. I want to highlight two of them today.

Number one is God has promised to be present with his people in the form of his spirit – make himself known to us through his spirit. The spirit of God's presence is uniquely traced throughout history in the Bible. We see in the very beginning, Genesis 1:1-2, God created right there: “In the beginning, the heavens and the earth.” The Earth was formless and empty, and darkness was over the surface of the deep. It's a time before form had been brought in, before God had brought the created world, the physical world, into existence. And the scripture says the spirit of God was hovering over the waters. There was a presence, a hovering of the spirit of God, before creation was formed and shaped and brought into existence. We know from the scriptures, God, the father and God, the son and God, the spirit, the three and one, miraculous three were there. And when they spoke, the world came to shape and form and into existence. The presence of God was there by his spirit in the beginning. And then, as we read throughout history, the spirit of God did its work in the world sporadically for many, many years. Sporadically, the spirit of God came in power, primarily upon Israel's leaders in Old Testament times. You can read many examples of the Holy Spirit coming up on individuals, helping them prophecy something that God wanted known, or giving them inspiration and direction and leadership. But the spirit would come and go in those times upon people. One example would be in Judges 3:9-10, when God's people were crying out to him for help and restoration, and the scripture says he raised up for them a deliverer, Othniel, son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, who saved them. The spirit of the Lord, came on him so that he became Israel's judge and went to war.

This is one example of many, but the Holy Spirit came and went and touched God's people and did restoring work. You can even read about the Holy Spirit, you know, the presence of God, causing a donkey to speak at one point in the Old Testament. So, the spirit of God hovered there over the surface in the very beginning. The spirit of God visited individuals and did some grace work and inspiration work and correction work all throughout Old Testament times. But in these New Testament times, the times that we're living in today, the spirit of God has become a promised indwelling resident in the heart of every true believer. You know, this is an epiphany, this is a revelation, this is what I believe is one of the greatest times in history to be living because of this reality, because of this truth. You know, when Jesus was here in John 14, he said, "I will ask the father," before he left, "I'll ask the father and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever. The spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him because it neither sees him or knows him. But you know him for he lives with you and will be in you." This was before the Holy Spirit came in power upon the believers, but Jesus was saying this. He said, "He lives with you now, but he will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you," as he adopts us and gives us rebirth by the power of his spirit into his family. We become sons and daughters of the most high God. In Luke 24, Jesus said this: "I'm going to send you what my father has promised, but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." Jesus was speaking about a coming presence of God in a new way, a presence that could never be taken away, a presence that wouldn't come and go, but a presence that would be with us forever.

In John 16, we have recorded for us these words of Jesus: "Very truly, I tell you, it is for your good that I'm going away." Jesus in the flesh said "It's good that I'm going away," he's going back to Heaven, because, he said, "Unless I go away, the advocate will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you." And of course, then we know the disciples went to Jerusalem and they gathered together and they prayed in unison for numerous days. And then what was like tongues of fire came upon them, and the Holy Spirit came within them. And from that point forward, the promised Holy Spirit has been present with every individual believer in God's family and will never leave us. The scripture says this in Ephesians 1:13: "When you believe you are marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit." When you believe you are marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until that full redemption of those who are God's possession, and this is all to the praise of his glory.

It was so loving for Jesus to come among us and offer himself as a sacrifice for our sins. But then it's even loving of him to ascend back to Heaven so that he could send his spirit to be with us. And this work of God's spirit is powerful in our lives, can be powerful in our lives. The presence of God's spirit would now allow, in this time in history, God's people just a few things the scripture reveals to us, his people to do greater works than him. Because now his spirit is present in believers all over the world. He's not constrained by a physical body, but he's pouring out his spirit on people. This is the spirit of truth that could help open people's eyes to what is true, to the revelations, the manifestations, the epiphanies of God's word to see what is really true, what is real, what is the revelation of God. The spirit can empower us to do greater works than Jesus, to see the truth, to enjoy what we would call a *koinonia*, a fellowship of the spirit, an intimacy with God, and an intimacy with one another; and would allow us to receive personal correction for our own lives, personal instruction for our own lives, personal training and living life to the full that God has for each of us. The presence of God's spirit is now with us. We're living in those days where the prophet Joel said, in those days, "I'll pour out my spirit on all people." This is the presence of God with us now.

A question for you today: are you aware of this obvious presence of God in your life? Have you given your life to Christ and confessed your sin and invited Jesus to come in and forgive you for your sinfulness before God? And if you've done this, and then you believe upon the Lord Jesus, then his spirit lives within you. Are you aware of this obvious presence of God in your life? Are you working at cultivating an awareness of this presence? How might this change you if you knew more of his presence in your life? God has promised to be with his people in the form of his spirit and never leave us and never forsake us. And his presence is to be a continually life-changing and inspiring force in our lives. "We have to learn to see him," Oliver Price says, "we have to learn to see Christ's invisible presence with the eye of faith." But it can be done. We can come to sense his presence in our lives. We can come to feel his life-changing presence. Are you willing today to welcome the spirit of God's presence in your life? Are you open to him? Or are you grieving him and resisting him or quenching him, working to put out the spirit's inspiration or fire in your life? God is with you. If you have come to believe on him, he resides within you. The very presence of God is at hand. Are you willing to welcome him and his presence into your life? Are you willing to let him take charge of you in your life today? Are you willing to let him change you?

I was with a fellow preacher this past weekend and I got to sit with him after and talked with him a little bit about his beliefs and his faith and his philosophy of ministry. And as we were talking, he said his philosophy is built on the obvious presence and the effective leadership of Christ. Is your faith built on the obvious presence of Christ and his desire to actively lead you? These questions were questions that he asked me. Are you willing to welcome the Spirit's presence in your life, are you willing to let him take charge of your life? Are you willing to let him change you? And then are you willing to let him bring you into harmony with his will for your life here in the world?

You know, the presence of God can be the most precious thing we know. In the end, the presence of God changes everything for us: the fruits that come into our lives, our love and joy and peace. And there's a fullness to be filled with the power and the work of God in our lives. This is why when God said to Moses in the Old Testament, he said, "I want you to go into the promised land, it's time to go." And he said, "I'm going to send an angel before you, but I'm not going to go with you." And God was frustrated with the Israelite people at this time because they had rebelled against him and built a golden calf and they were idolatrous and straying from the Lord and not acknowledging that his presence had been with them. And God was frustrated, so frustrated. He said, "I'm not going to go with you, but I'll send an angel ahead of you before you, before you to lead you into the promised land." But Moses said this to God. He said, "If your presence does not go with us," Exodus 33, starting in 14 through 17, said, "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 peoples of 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." God is merciful and kind and is forgiving and graceful. And the Lord then said to Moses, "My presence will go with you and I will give you rest."

Friends, what distinguishes a person in the world as a child of the most high God? One of the distinguishing factors is the very witness of the spirit is within them. Are you open to let the spirit work in your life throughout this year, 2022? Are you open to his presence, to his leadership, to his correction, to his instruction, to his training, to causing you in your heart to come into congruence with his will? The very presence of God is with us today, by his spirit. If you've never opened your heart to Jesus Christ, today would be a great day to do it. Open your heart to Christ, invite him in, and you

will receive the presence, the powerful presence of his spirit working in your life from that day forward.

Let's pray together. Father, thank you for teaching us what to believe and how to live in your word. As we look today at the promised presence of your spirit with us, help us be open to your work in our lives. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.