

Desiring the Presence of God

Jeremiah 29:11-13

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart”

In modern, sanitized, homogenized, distilled and politically correct seeker sensitive churches, has the church become just a wee bit complacent in our seeking God with all our hearts?

I'd like to take excerpts of my text this morning from Exodus 33

Exodus 33:1-3

*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.’ 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 are a stiff-necked people and I might destroy you on the way***

What does stiff-necked mean here?

Obstinate, Hard, Difficult, Stubborn

So... Stiff Necked people and the presence of God...

Exodus 33:7-15

*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.*

Moses had to meet with God in a tent OUTSIDE of the camp until Moses pleads with God to live in the midst of them.

I don't know about you, but I want God's presence right here and right now. I don't want to go home to my prayer closet to find him. I want him with me all the time

and here in this service right now. How many of you here today, know that we worship God with our lives and he is here with us in this place right now!

Can I get a thank you Jesus!

Back to our text...

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. 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 worshiped, each at the entrance to their tent. The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a 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."*

We need to humble ourselves and our ways and methods and ask the Lord to teach us his ways. It is in his ways we find peace and rest.

***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.***

As worshipers of God, is that the cry of our hearts today? Do we want to be in his presence always? Do we need God more than our next breath?

It is said that the great philosopher and orator of Greek descent named Socrates had a young man approach him one day, and this young man said, "Can I be one of your disciples because I want to know wisdom and increase in my knowledge?" Socrates, who by this time was a wise, old sage, took one look at the young man and said, "Follow me." The young man followed him into the waters of a nearby river. Socrates took the young man's head and submerged it under water for about 15 seconds. When the young man came out of the water - dripping wet, Socrates said, "What do you want?" The young man said, "Knowledge, wise man. I want knowledge." Socrates took this young man and put his head under twice as long as the last time. When the young man came out, he was gasping for air. Socrates again said, "What do you want, young man?" He again said, "Knowledge. I want knowledge." This time, which was a third time, Socrates dunked him down under the water and kept him down to what the audience seemed like forever. His started to flail about, flinging his hands this way and that, and people in the audience began to gasp as they thought Socrates was about to drown him.

When the young man came out of the water, Socrates again said, "What do you want?" This time the young man was saying, "Air, I want air. Give me air." To that, Socrates said, "When you want knowledge like you want air, then you will have it."

So I ask again: Do we need God more than our next breath?

Friends, when we want the presence of God more than our next breath we will have it! What did we read as I opened this message today:

Jeremiah 29:11-13

*"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. **You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart**"*

What else can we pick up from Moses here?

Moses is honest with God and agrees that the people are "Obstinate". Yet, we see in him the heart of a leader and an intercessor as he pleads with God to pardon their iniquity and take them as his special possession.

He approaches God with honesty, where he is at and God accepts him as a friend.

How many people here know that we are precious to God?

- Deuteronomy 7:6 tells us that we are God's special treasure
- Romans 8:17 tells us that we are joint heirs with Christ
- 2 Corinthians 6:18 tells us that we are his sons and daughters

- 1 Peter 2:9 says:

"But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light"

So... Why when Christ has torn the veil and we are reconciled with the Father, Redeemed by Christ's blood, Justified and righteous through him do we not live in revival and his presence continually?

We are simply content to live without...

So let's change gears a bit...

When we examine ourselves what does God look like to us?

I am reminded of a story:

A kindergarten teacher gave an assignment. The assignment was to draw a picture of a person that they felt was a big part of their life. The children got busy drawing pictures, coloring and sticking out their tongues and goofing off like little kids like to do when they're drawing. The teacher walked around the class and saw some of these little people drawing pictures of the Prime Minister, Barney and others such as sports players, their Mom and their Dad. One little boy seemed very intent in drawing this picture. She looked over his shoulder and said, "Timmy, who are you drawing?" Without missing a beat or looking up, Timmy kept drawing and said, "God." She said, "Well Timmy, you know that no one knows what God looks like." Timmy said, "They will when I am done with this picture."

Have we sought him with our whole heart? Do we know what we are searching for?

My friends, I believe that our spiritual hunger needs to be just like the young man that approached Socrates. When we desire God desperately with passion, intensity and burning fire then we will experience the fullness of God. I believe this because he has promised that when we seek him with all our heart we will find him.

Am I alone on this?

When I see the desire for God in countries like South America, Africa and Asia, when there is a completely different dynamic and atmosphere, I grow concerned. As a pastor, you have blessed me with time to pray, study, and think on the things of God. In this process, I have had to ask the Lord in prayer. "Precious Jesus, what is missing? Have I overlooked something? Why is there a fire there and yet for many churches here in North America it seems to be missing?"

...There is a hunger for the Lord, a holy hunger and desire for him that seems, for the most part to be missing. Why God, is the world experiencing a torrent of church planting and evangelistic efforts, yet with a few notable exceptions, my country seems to be missing the boat?

Friends, when I read the passage about Moses conversation with God and he asks God, teach me your ways o' Lord. This has become the cry of my heart.

I would love for all of our churches to grow to bursting, but I am reminded of the scripture in Psalms 127:1a –

"Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it."

I am forced to conclude that we need to adopt his ways and we need his presence.

Can I get an Amen to that?

God has created a hunger in each one of his children. I believe that if you are here today and you have NO holy hunger, passion or desire that drives you and motivates you to want more of Jesus. Then you are starving.

I believe that if you have to force yourself to read the Word, pray or go to church, then you are living not as new creations in Christ Jesus, but in a way that God has not designed you to live. You are missing out on the goodness of God and his presence in your lives.

My mission field is Salmo and the Kootenays. While my heart goes out to those in Africa and other countries who are struggling to eat food; I am far more concerned about those here in Salmo, in the Kootenays and in North America who are starving because they are not getting the nourishment to their soul that God designed each person to receive.

Maybe those in third world countries are seeing people healed, and raised from the dead, because they have learned the lesson that starving sucks!

I want his presence! Do you?

As we study the scripture we see that God manifested himself in the temple in Shekinah Glory. God came down upon them with so much power and love that the priests who were dedicating the temple had to stop the services because the presence of God was so overwhelming

Now God hasn't changed...

Hebrews 13:8 Says: *"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."*

What has changed?

What Moses was asking for..."Oh God, I want your tangible and manifest presence to go with us. God, if you do not go, I am not going anywhere."

Friends, going nowhere is not an option. God has given us a vision for this church and a commission to make disciples. We have been experiencing and will experience to an even greater extent the presence of God. It is Him building his house not us.

So what do we do?

We have talked about living our lives as a living sacrifice before God. We have said that we will live our lives in worship to him. Since we know that God inhabits the praises of his people. His presence is with us here in praise and worship and with us as we glorify him in our everyday lives.

Okay, so what? Do we work harder? Do we try to be more spiritual? What?

Let me ask a couple of questions more and I will answer the challenge of this sermon today....

Have you ever heard the Holy Spirit in a quiet voice say anything like: "You have been doing your work, not mine.", "Has he ever said you are doing this based on your skillset and in your power not mine.", perhaps he has said: "I never asked you to do that in the first place." Has he ever said: "I asked you to do this but you did not because you have chosen to fear and do something else to look spiritual"

It comes down to this my friends; we cannot make even a dent in the kingdom of God on our own or in our own power. If we want to see lives changed we have to seek God with our whole hearts, we have to throw our own wisdom and ways out the window, swallow our pride and allow him to lead us. Just like Moses we need to ask him into our camp and ask for his abiding presence. We need to pray and read and learn his ways. We need to listen to his Holy Spirit and seek his presence.

Holy hunger creates a dependence on God's presence in our lives and an unwillingness to go forward without it.

This morning I prayed: "Jesus, I will go where you lead me and do what you ask. Lord, if you are not going to be with me and show up in power and authority, then I am not going to go, because I have learned that I can do nothing without you. God without you I am OUT. Lord, you have to go before me and lead and guide my footsteps. God, I pray and seek you today with all my heart and I take you at your word that I will find you. Lord I want to see your presence today, every day and in everything I do. Please Jesus teach me your ways."

Let me close with a re-reading of this scripture:

Jeremiah 29:11-13

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart"

Let's host the presence - always!