

Let everything that has breath
praise the Lord. Praise the Lord!

Psalm 150:6

Praise Points

with Karen Holland

Presence

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Acts 2:42-47

Just think, what would happen if Jesus appeared in a visible tangible way, in your midst, during Sunday morning service or other gatherings? What impact would his presence have on the singing; preaching and teaching of the word; praying, fellowship, holiness, listening and witnessing? Reflect on this; ponder each area before continuing on.

When we gather together, isn't one of the main reasons to recognize the very presence of God; to bless and glorify the Lord and to let Christ dwell richly among the members of His body?

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Colossians 3:15-17

If we don't recognize the presence of the Lord in our midst, how can the Lord truly be blessed and glorified? How can Christ dwell richly? Without recognizing His presence, singing is just singing, preaching and teaching are mere words, and everything else becomes just another meeting. It would be like dressing up and going on a special date to a fine restaurant with great food and a wonderful ambience; but yet not acknowledging or engaging the person you are with in a meaningful way. This is not how I would want a date with my husband to be. When I'm with my husband, I want to connect with him, to talk and listen to him, to look into his eyes, to do things that will please him. Similarly, Sunday worship or any gathering of His body should be a time to connect and communicate with Christ (our bridegroom) and His body, to do things that will please Him, and to know that He accepted the sacrifice of praise that was offered. All of this starts by the Lord revealing Himself to and being recognized by His people.

How vital is the Lord's presence to you; to your gatherings; to your Sunday service and to your walk with the Lord?

*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. 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?

Exodus 33:12-16

Here in Exodus we see that the presence of the Lord was so vital to Moses that he said to the Lord that if the Lord's Presence was not going to come with them, then they would not go. Moses would not go to the promised land, the land of milk and honey (Exodus 33:3), without the Lord. The Lord's presence was more important to Moses than the promised land. Moses was unwilling to go even though the Lord had prepared the way; even though an angel of the Lord was to be sent before (Exodus 33:1-2). For Moses only the Lord's visible tangible Presence would suffice.

The Lord is omniscient, ever present. We cannot go anywhere in the earth where the presence of the Lord is not (Psalm 139:7). Here in this passage this is not the presence that Moses is talking about. When the Lord said to Moses that His presence would not go, He was not saying that He would not have anything more to do with him; after all the Lord was sending His chosen Angel with them. The Angel would not have done anything apart from God's will.

So what aspect of the Lord's presence was Moses speaking about? Moses was speaking about the tangible visible presence of God. This presence is revealed intimately, personally, and corporately in the heart of believers through the 'person' of Jesus Christ. It is this tangible presence that sets the Lord's people apart as distinct. Jesus promised us in Matthew 18:20, *For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.* So it is true that we can say confidently that Jesus Christ Himself is right there with us whenever two or three are gathered in His name whether we sense His tangible presence or not. This, however, is different than what happened in Acts 2. In Acts 2, the 'person' of Jesus Christ came among the disciples in the form of the Holy Spirit in a way that everyone knew it. They experienced His tangible presence rather than simply affirming it as a point of doctrine.

Some will say that believing the promise in Matthew 18:20 is enough, that it is not really important whether the Lord's people sense His presence in a tangible way or not. Some have even said that we should not focus on whether or not the Lord's tangible presence is manifest in our midst or not. They seem to fear that seeking the Lord's tangible presence somehow makes the worshipper the object of the gathering rather than the Lord. Is this really true?

There is a certain amount of truth in this; we want to be careful that we are not seeking experience just for the sake of experience. We also want to be careful we are not just seeking after the supernatural; seeking or demanding signs and wonders. *The Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus and tested him by asking him to show them a sign from heaven. He replied, When evening comes, you say, It will be fair weather, for the sky is red, and in the morning, 'Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast. You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah. JESUS THEN LEFT THEM AND WENT AWAY.* (Matthew 16:1-4)

But to say that it is not important whether or not Jesus Christ is experienced in a tangible way during our gatherings is a serious mistake. Jesus Christ is a living God, our relationships with Him should also be living. *For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.* (2 Corinthians 6:16)

While we are not to demand signs and wonders or seek supernatural experiences just for the sake of experience, if we are truly seeking the Lord Jesus Christ with our whole hearts He will be found by us (Jeremiah 29:13). *And these signs will follow those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.* (Mark 16:17-18)

It's a matter of the heart! Take another look at the above passage in Exodus. It is very important for us today, for in it Moses reveals his heart. He wanted to know God's ways because he wanted to know God. This was the motive, the hunger in the heart of Moses. Moses wanted to continue to know God more and more. He was crying out, not for more facts about God, not even for the promised land, but to know God in a living relationship in all His glory. He

wanted a personal relationship, to see God face to face and to find favor and grace in His sight. Moses had a passion for the presence of the Lord. He preferred this living relationship with the living God even when offered one of the Lord's chosen Angels as accompaniment to the promised land. I wonder how many of us today would make the same decision, would chose the Lord's tangible Presence above all. To say that it is not important whether or not Jesus Christ is experienced in a tangible way during our gatherings has the danger of dampening this hunger for the Lord's presence, of hearts growing cold. David also had this passion in His heart for the Lord's tangible presence.

*As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me all day long, "Where is your God?" These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go with the multitude, leading the procession to the house of God, with shouts of joy and thanksgiving among the festive throng. Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His presence** {countenance}.*

Psalm 42:1-5

It is no coincidence that the Hebrew word for presence in Exodus 33:15 is *paniyim* <06440>**. The same word is translated countenance in the Psalms. In Exodus 33:15 it is used to stress the continual going of the presence, the turning of God's face towards, the shining of His countenance on -- His favor on His people. Psalm 42:5 is placing all hope in the Lord, in the saving acts of His face, in the saving acts of the Lord's Presence and intervention.

The Lord is found by those who seek Him with their whole hearts, those who have a burning hunger for Him (Deuteronomy 4:29; Jeremiah 29:13).

Check your heart today. Are you willing to accept gatherings where the Lord Jesus Christ's tangible presence is not? Or do you have a burning passion in your heart like Moses and David? A thirst and a hunger to know Jesus, to have a living relationship in all of His fullness? A thirst like that of the panting deer. The panting deer that places all hope in the Lord, praising Him for the help of His presence (countenance). *How blessed are the people who worship you, who know the joyful sound! O LORD, they walk in the light of Your presence** {countenance}.* (Psalm 89:15 NASB) *Blessed are the people who know the passwords of praise, who shout on parade in the bright presence of GOD!* (Psalm 89:15 MSG)

For it's at the sound of worship in spirit and in truth that the Lord blesses and keeps His people, that He turns His face and shines upon them, pouring out His grace on them giving them His peace and the light of His presence, His favor (Numbers 6:24-26). It's at the sound of this worship that He turns His face towards His people. For these are the worshippers the Lord is seeking (John 4:23). *The eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him.* (2 Chronicles 16:9)

Let us join with Moses and cry out to the Lord that 'we will not go unless His presence goes with us!' Let our hearts not grow cold, let us press in with a hunger and passion that thirsts for the living God as the deer pants for the streams of living water. The Lord will turn His face towards us. He will bless us with His tangible presence, showing the light and favor of His face making His people distinct. He will smile (Psalm 44:3, 89:15**)!

O 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. Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands. My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you.

Psalm 63:1-5

The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.

Numbers 6:24-26

****Footnote on Exodus 33:15** from NetBible

<http://net.bible.org/verse.php?book=Exo&chapter=33&verse=15>:

2 tn The construction uses the active participle to stress the continual going of the presence: if there is not your face going.

****Footnote on Psalm 42:5** from NetBible

<http://net.bible.org/verse.php?book=Psa&chapter=42&verse=5>:

4 tc Heb “for again I will give him thanks, the saving acts of his face.” The verse division in the Hebrew text is incorrect. יְהוָה (’elohay, “my God”) at the beginning of v. 7 belongs with the end of v. 6 (see the corresponding refrains in 42:11 and 43:5, both of which end with “my God” after “saving acts of my face”). The Hebrew term פָּנָיו (panayv, “his face”) should be emended to פְּנֵי (p̄ney, “face of”). The emended text reads, “[for] the saving acts of the face of my God,” that is, the saving acts associated with God’s presence/intervention.

****Footnote on Psalm 44:3** from NetBible

<http://net.bible.org/verse.php?book=Psa&chapter=44&verse=3>:

5 tn Heb “light of your face.” The idiom “light of your face” probably refers to a smile (see Eccl 8:1), which in turn suggests favor and blessing (see Num 6:25; Pss 4:6; 31:16; 67:1; 80:3, 7, 19; 89:15; Dan 9:17).

****Footnote on Psalm 89:15** from NetBible

<http://net.bible.org/verse.php?book=Psa&chapter=89&verse=15>:

2 tn Heb “in the light of your face they walk.” The idiom “light of your face” probably refers to a smile (see Eccl 8:1), which in turn suggests favor and blessing (see Num 6:25; Pss 4:6; 31:16; 44:3; 67:1; 80:3, 7, 19; Dan 9:17).

****paniym <06440>** from NetBible <http://net.bible.org/strong.php?id=06440>:

definition:

1) face

1a) face, faces

1b) presence, person

1c) face (of seraphim or cherubim)

1d) face (of animals)

1e) face, surface (of ground)

1f) as adv of loc/temp

1f1) before and behind, toward, in front of, forward, formerly, from beforetime, before

1g) with prep

1g1) in front of, before, to the front of, in the presence of, in the face of, at the face or front of, from the presence of, from before, from before the face of