

Presence//#2, “Presence” ☒–23

Good morning Summit Church... week 2 of our Presence series. Let me read the passage here for you:

33:1 The Lord said to Moses, “Depart; go up from here, you and the people whom you have brought up out of the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, ‘To your offspring I will give it.’ **2** I will send an angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

3 Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; but I will not go up among you, lest I consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people.”

7 Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, far off from the camp, and he called it the tent of meeting. And everyone who sought the Lord would go out to the tent of meeting, which was outside the camp. **8** Whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people would rise up, and each would stand at his tent door, and watch Moses until he had gone into the tent. **9** When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and the Lord would speak with Moses. **10** And when all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would rise up and worship, each at his tent door. **11** Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses turned again into the camp, his assistant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent.

15 And Moses said to God, “If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. **16** For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?” **17** And the Lord said to Moses, “This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name.” **18** Moses said, “Please show me your glory.”

19 And he said, “I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name ‘The Lord.’ And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. **20** But,” he said, “you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.” **21** And the Lord said, “Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, **22** and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of

the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. **23** Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen.”

God’s whole point in the Exodus was calling people out to know Him. He reveals himself in Ex 19–40.

Last week, we did ch 19, today, we’re going to jump ahead to chapter 33 ... because that chapter teaches a really important truth I want to emphasize in this series. We’re going to skip about 14 chapters, I know which bothers some of you type-A people, but in the coming weeks we’re going to go back and work through them as well.

So let me catch you up on what has just happened ... in chapter 20 Moses goes up into the mountain to get the 10 commandments ... well, He stays up there a little longer than he’d planned, so the people get scared... “Where is Moses? Is he gone? I’m scared; I feel vulnerable; I feel all alone.” “Me too...” Someone says, “I know, let’s make an idol that will make us feel safe.” “Yeah, great idea.” So they all take off their earrings and nose rings and their watches and the gold caps off their teeth and the 20” rims off of their chariots and melt them down and make this golden calf; then, they all get naked and start worshipping it.

You get this image? Moses is up on the mountain of fire and smoke with God getting the 10 commandments, and all the people of Israel are down on Franklin St. getting jiggy with it in front of an idol.

Well, needless to say, God is ticked, so Moses and God have a series of conversations where Moses *pleads* with God not to destroy the people and God finally says, “OK.” But He then says what you saw at the beginning of this chapter, He says, “Look, take the people on in to the land I promised them. I’ll do what I said: I’ll vanquish all of their enemies, I’ll make them prosperous; take care of them... but my presence is not going to go with them, because I’d probably end up killing them.”

Moses’ response is very important: “God, if you’re presence is not going to go with us, we don’t want to go.”

Did you get that? God offered to defeat their enemies, bless their crops ... but just not go with them, and Moses said, “Without your presence, we don’t want to go.”

So here is my question for you today: What if God promised all the blessings of life to you: a good marriage, good health, good family... but He Himself would not go with you ... would that be OK?

Moses says “No.” Because...

Presence is the point of Christianity
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The whole point of the Exodus is Israel might come to know God. He wasn't just delivering Israel as an act of political compassion, but so that they might know God. By "know" I don't mean "know about" or "know what He wants" but *know*, like you would know a friend! (see that phrase, v 11, "God spoke to Moses as a man speaks to his friend"?) That's the goal, personal, intimate relationship with God.

That's one of the things that make the Bible's approach to God very different from other religions. Other religions major on what God wants you to do: rules you need to keep; rituals you need to observe; but the Bible focuses on knowing, not doing.

Go back to Genesis and the Garden of Eden: In the cool of the evening, God would come down to walk with them... which I've always thought was a really intriguing phrase. After work God comes down for a stroll? Does God keep office hours? If He can create the whole universe by a spoken word, does He really need to put in office time? And what is it about the cool of the day? And if he likes cool weather, why doesn't He just make some cloud cover? At any rate, the point is that God did not leave them a list of rules and tell them to get on with their lives; they walked around with and talked with and knew God. They probably smoked some non-carcinogenic cigars.

When God leads them out of slavery, He joins them by a pillar of cloud/Then that cloud set down in a tabernacle/

Soon that tabernacle became a temple and God's presence set right down in the middle of it.

When Jesus was born on earth, one of the names the angel said to call Him was "Immanuel" which meant literally, "God is now with us." One of the surprising things that Jesus said that messed everybody up was that He was Himself the temple. Jesus looked at the temple and said, "If you tear the temple down I'll raise it up in 3 days." They're like, "What? It took 40 years to build!" The writer says they didn't realize the temple He was talking about, was His own body. He was the place where God lived. (A lot of times when I read overeducated Bible critics they'll make a statement like, "Jesus never claimed to be God"?)

When Jesus left, the Holy Spirit came and possessed the first believers and every believer thereafter. Adam and Eve said God walks with us; when people saw the temple they said "God is in the midst of us;" Immanuel was "God with us;" the Holy Spirit was God in us.

What man lost when we were cast out of the Garden of Eden was God's presence. And so, that's what our hearts have always yearned for—to know God again; to be reunited to Him and to know Him again; to have Him be again our father and our friend. You may not have known it, but it's what you yearn for.

The human condition is one of *nakedness*. We long to be clothed again with the presence of God.

That's what this is all about... God's presence restored to your life.

That's what makes us distinct! **16** For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I

and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?" *What sets us apart?* Not simply what we believe or how we live, but the presence of God with us! So before I move from this, let me just ask a question. Is that what you are known for? Is that the main description of Christianity in your life? When I ask you about being a Christian will you start immediately telling me about your personal knowledge of and communion with God? Usually, you ask people about their religion and they start telling you about what they believe and what they do and who they vote for and what they won't drink and what words they won't say... but that's not the heart of Christianity.

Max the Dog. Is that what Jesus died to create? An obedient group of disabled, neutered dogs? He wants a group of people to love Him with all their heart and soul. You were created for passionate, soul upheaving love and adoration of God! You are supposed to love and feel for God what you have never felt for another human being!

Listen, let me tell you when you really need to know this:

When you are in pain, what you need are not just doctrines about how God is working it all for good... what you need sometimes is the touch of a Savior who has been through pain... who knows what it is to lose a child; to be betrayed by a friend; to be alienated from a Father. There are times in my life when I scream out for answers... and what I get is simply the **presence of God** ... and it is enough.

So here's my next question...

What is the presence of God?

For many, to say, "God is with us" simply means we were successful. "God be with you," means "hope things work out!" I heard a guy the other night talking about the phrase, "Godspeed." What does that mean? Someone is leaving and you say, "Godspeed!" How fast is that? The captain of your airplane comes on and says, "We've reached a comfortable cruising altitude of 36,000 feet and are now travelling at GODSPEED." What? Look out the window... see Jesus in a cape flying beside you... "

But the presence of God doesn't mean just success, because you see in this chapter that God says, "I'll bless you but *not* go with you." It's possible to be very "blessed" and to live completely apart from the presence of God.

Many think presence means some strange weird feeling.

Got friends in churches who say "God was here"... they get goosebumps or people shouted and rolled around. What they usually means is that there was a moment when the speaker was really into it... or because the music hit a crescendo... Our Hispanic pastor told us that in many churches he grew up in the louder the music was the more it was assumed God was there.

Best story I've heard about this: **Reverb**

This chapter shows you exactly what it is. Remember at the end of chapter 33 Moses says to God, "Let me see your glory," and God says, OK, I'll pass right in front of you

... Here's how chapter 34 describes that.

Exodus 34:5 The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. **6** The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness ...

Don't miss this: How did God show Himself to Moses? He proclaimed His name. What is the presence of God? It is a firsthand, heart knowledge of the name of God: His character, His size, the immensity of His love.

I'm talking about much more than just understanding the doctrines of God. It is knowing them intimately, *tasting* them.

D. Martyn-Lloyd Jones: Like my daughter knowing my love... the presence of God is a sense of His immense love, His greatness, His holiness, His power. Churches like ours often become classrooms, learning facts about God ... as if that were the point.

Imagine you came up to me and said, "Tell me about your wife..." Veronica Marie McPeters was born on such and such date. The doctor who delivered her was named Fred... Her first boyfriend's name was Alfonzo... In college she majored in... She has a scar behind her left earlobe ... You may be impressed with how much I know about her.

That's totally different than if you say "tell me about your wife," and I tell you about how much I enjoy getting home from work and just being around her; how she seems to know just what to say when I'm down; how I know what she really loves and what turns her on. That's a knowledge beyond facts. That's the kind of knowledge that says, "I'm really tired. I just want to go home and be with my best friend." There is a difference in knowing *about* and *knowing, loving, and desiring*.

Churches like ours often become classrooms where we learn **about** God rather than sanctuaries where we experience and commune *with* God.

Now, I want to be careful here not to drive too much of a wedge between knowing the Bible and knowing God, because the only way to know God is to know the Bible and anyone who drives a wedge between those two is a fool.

But I do want to point out that many of us worship our knowledge of the Bible and not the *God* of the Bible. We want to be full of God-facts so that we can be puffed up with pride at how much we know, but we don't really want or crave or desire to know God at all.

Some of you in here who know the Bible the best have no real desire to be in it on a daily basis (you do it from discipline); it's why you have all kinds of unconquered sin in your life (lust, materialism, pornography); it's why you are unbearable to be around because you're always trying to show everyone how smart and spiritual you are. (You have theological BO. You know a lot but people

can't stand to be around you because your spirit stinks.) That's because what you're in love with is not God but your own pride.

So, am I saying quit learning the Bible? Of course not. Just make sure your learning is a means to an end and that you love **God**, not knowledge.

Can I say... ***This is what I love about charismatic churches.*** Charismatics know that the presence of God is the point and they yearn for it. I've been in a charismatic church when someone leans over to me and said "He's here." You come into our churches and lean over and say that to somebody and they're like, "Who's here?" We don't even know who you're talking about.

That's what I love about charismatics. What I don't like about them is that they often try and force the presence of God, or think they can do something that will make Him show up... They're like "if we jump up and down long enough then God will come." If we'll keep playing this chord and singing this phrase over and over again God appears." I've stood in these churches for like an hour singing one phrase over and over. (not exaggerating) Does God really like Eflat? If you say "Oh Lord, you are here" enough, will He just show up on cue?

How about this... so you charismatics won't think I'm picking on you too much: My home church used to put revival on the calendar every year. Really? We can just schedule God to show up here, during this week, and all be revived? Couldn't we get Him to come sooner? You can't schedule the presence of God.

The other thing I don't like about a lot of charismatics is that they usually define the presence of God as a weird mystical experience, not a new fresh understanding of His name, like you see here.

But at least they get it that there is supposed to be something experiential in all of this: In our tradition... we'd have been here in this chapter and said ... "Hmm... so, you'll bless us, make us successful... but you're presence is not going to go with us? OK. Maybe you could at least give us a book about You we could obsess and argue over?"

Guys, I love the Bible. I love teaching it and knowing it. But I don't want us to be a place of knowledge; I want us to be a place of presence. And to be a place of presence, we have to have our minds full of the word of God and our hearts full of the Spirit of God.

If you have the Spirit without the Word, you blow up. If you have the Word without the Spirit, you dry up. If you have both the Word and the Spirit, you grow up. It's why I've told you that I want the head of a Reformed Baptist; the heart of a Pentecostal, and the feet of a Jehovah's Witness .

Presence is an immediate, first-hand heart sense of the size, the character, and the attributes of God.

Let me give you a few examples of this:

Jonathan Edwards: *"Sometimes only mentioning a single word will cause my heart to burn within me; only seeing the name of Christ or some attribute of God will suddenly make my heart burn, and God suddenly appears glorious to me, making*

me have exalting thoughts of God. When I enjoy this sweetness it seems to carry me above the thoughts of my own estate. It seems that at such times I am at such a loss that I cannot bear it and I cannot bring myself even to take my eye from this Glorious Object; I cannot bear to turn my eye to myself or anything else."

Beyond doctrine, this is a sense of the majesty and beauty of God in His heart.

Josh 2:9: *"I know that the Lord has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you."* The people of the land had a sense of God's size and majesty so when Israel went out to do battle, everyone's hearts were melted with fear. What happens when the people of RDU have a sense of God's size so that when we go out to preach their hearts are ready to hear? Do you realize how much easier this makes our outreach efforts?

You see the same thing in the New Testament in the book of Acts: After the early church was filled with the Holy Spirit, it says **Acts 2:43-45:** *Everyone was filled with awe... they praised God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.* There was such a sense of awe in the community that people were coming into the fellowship every day.

In **Acts 4:31**, *"After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.* Here you've got the church being filled with the presence of God and the place where they were meeting shakes and they go out and speak the word of God with such boldness that people were *astonished*. Here's a question: "When is the last time you were astonished by the boldness of our church members? What we have are people who are extremely educated but lack boldness. The mentality today in most of our churches is that you only need one Spirit filled person in the room and that's me." (Francis Chan) Presence for these guys meant boldness all through the community.

1 Cor 14:24-25: **24** *...an unbeliever comes in... 25 and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, "God is really among you!"* See what I'm getting at?

That is my desire for this church. Not that we be a place of doctrine, but that we be a place of presence.

Many churches are like: the altar built... but no fire!

So, there's our last question:

"How do we get the presence of God?"

7 Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, far off from the camp, and he called it the tent of meeting. And everyone who sought the Lord would go out to the tent of meeting, which was outside the camp... **11** ...and Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent.

What do you see there? Desire... expressed in earnest, continual prayer.

More than anything, Joshua seems to want to know God, so He took the time to be with God. We live in an instant world. Matrix downloaded. That's not how really any relationship works.

The presence of God comes into your life when you seek it more than anything in earnest, continual prayer.

One of the best decisions I've ever made in college ...Even now... it is better for me to take a day; an evening; seek God. Turn off the TV.

Bro Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*: 16th century guy that committed himself to renounce all pleasure and to wash dishes in a monastery to try and pay for his sins. Instead he found such incredible delight in just knowing God. He left a great gift to the church in the form of a book called *the Practice of the Presence of God*. He said:

"The problem is that we take in so little time during our routine, two-minute devotions. We're blind to God's purposes because we unplug the wire that feeds the current of His grace into our lives.

On the other hand, when God comes upon a soul marinated with living faith, He pours out His grace and favors by the bucketful. They can then flow through the person's life like a river that has been kept from its normal course but is suddenly let loose by open floodgates to happily soak everything in its path."

Build a tabernacle and go to it and stay in it...

The presence of God comes into your life when you seek it more than anything in earnest, continual prayer.

This also means, by the way, that is the greatest desire you express in prayer. It is apparent that whatever was going on in Joshua's life, whatever he needed help with, what he most wanted was to know a little bit more of God.

When you pray, what are you praying most for? Help; a fix to a problem ... these things are good, but what do you want more, those things, or more of God?

Some of you are in pain and praying for God to fix the situation. ***But what if one of God's purposes in your pain was to allow you a chance to know more of Him?*** And what if you spend so much time bitter and angry at Him and everyone else that you think has wronged you that you miss out on what was supposed to be some of God's sweetest work in your life?

Broken pot.

So, the presence of God comes into your life when you seek it more than anything.

The presence of God will come into our church when we build tabernacles and pray...

NYC Prayer Revival: In 1857 in downtown Manhattan, Jeremiah Lanphier was hired to visit the local neighborhood and bring people to Christ. He

became very discouraged and frustrated. When he was frustrated he turned to prayer, and really found himself experiencing the presence of God. He went to elders and presented an idea to have a prayer meeting every Wednesday at noon. He would put a sign out and invite people to come in and pray – no preaching, no sermon, no proselytizing, and no minister. Elders responded “it will never work, but go ahead.” The first Wednesday, 6 people showed up. The second Wednesday, 20 people showed up. The third Wednesday, 40 people showed up, and somebody said “let’s do this every day.” Two months later, the whole Christian education wing was filled with hundreds of people every day at noon. They started other prayer meetings at noon. Soon the entire downtown area – every theatre, every church – was filled with men and women praying. Reporters estimated up to 10,000 people were praying everyday in lower Manhattan. Churches began having evening services and people started coming and receiving Christ. In a nine month period 50,000 people got converted and joined the church of NYC, when the population of NYC was about 800,000. 1 out of every 16 people converted in about a 9-10 month period. That is revival – the glory of God passing by. Word spread to Europe and a guy in Ireland decided to start a prayer meeting. In the next 3 years 100,000 of the 300,000 people in Ireland converted and joined the church – a third of the population

I want to see what happened in NYC happen here.
The only way it happens is through prayer! Acts and Pentecost. I want to see that.

When I think about what needs to happen in RDU ... what I want to happen before I die... I don’t see anywhere from here to there that doesn’t involve large moments of corporate prayer.

The pattern shown to me...at Campbell.

I feel like we’ve gotten away from this. Small groups. Time of prayer

The greatest gift we can give to our world and to our children is our intimacy with God.

Couple of other things:

33:5 For the Lord had said to Moses, “Tell the Israelites... Now take off your ornaments and I will decide what to do with you.” **6** So the Israelites stripped off their ornaments at Mount Horeb.

These were symbols of false worship. “If I am going to be with you, you must forsake those things that displease me.”

It always amazes me what people say to me sometime. They talk about wanting God to be in their life by they are engaged in things that they clearly know are displeasing to Him. You want God but you’re going to defiantly throw this in His face? You must forsake what He has forbidden.

One other thing. John explains this in the NT:

John 1:17–18: “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. **18** No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.

“grace and truth.” Same two words we saw in 34:6: **6** The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness ...

To know Jesus is to know the presence of God. Learn of Him. Get in one of our small groups. Read the Gospels. Follow Him with all your heart.

Galatians 3:2 says that God fills us with the Spirit as we learn more of Jesus. “*I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing the Gospel?*”

People have these questions about how to be filled with the Spirit. I’ve had people over the years ask if they can pray for me and bestow on me the 2nd blessing, and I appreciate their spirit... How do you get the Spirit? Believe the Gospel. You want more of the Spirit, to be filled with the Spirit, come to know Jesus more, believe the Gospel more, drive it down into your heart more deeply, and you WILL be filled with the Spirit!

The presence of God is the point; the Presence of God is a firsthand knowledge of God’s glory (His character, His attributes), and you get it through earnest, passionate prayer and by believing the Gospel.

Do you have the presence of God in your life? It begins with a relationship with Jesus Christ. Because of your sin you are separated from God. But Jesus died as a substitute for your sin. If you receive what He offers you, as a gift, and allow Him to take control of your life and be your Lord and Savior, He literally restores the presence of God to you. I know, in Christ, that God’s favor is toward me and that I am God’s friend. I know that if I died today I would be welcomed into heaven. Not because I’m any better than you, but because I’ve received what God has offered me in Christ. If you’ve never received it, you can today!

Bullpen:

Maybe tell us your favorite kind of music so we could play that and judge everyone else who doesn't do it like us?

Guys, I don't care about worship styles...I care about the presence of God.

When you can't make sense of life. Some of you will find that what you are missing is the presence of God. Like, your self-image is terrible. Because you feel like you've failed everyone and yourself... Self-image is based on what the most important person in your life thinks about you. What you need is to hear from God, "You are my beloved, precious, chosen, prepared child. I purchased you and made you mine in Christ." That one word can do what hours of counseling can never do.

Ultimately, what makes the people of God distinct is His presence with them. **16** For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?"

Before I move from this, let me just ask a question. Is what you are known for is the presence of God in your life? Is God your friend, do you know Him and walk with Him and talk with Him? Are you characterized by God answering prayer?

"Stick out everywhere"

Presence: Panim = face, mouth. To see His presence is to see the contours of His face

In Colossians and Ephesians, Paul gives a parallel passage, except that he switches one phrase: be filled with the Spirit for Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. *To be filled with the Spirit means that the word of Christ dwells in us richly.*

5:18 ...be filled with the Spirit. **19** Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, **20** always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ .

3:16 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.