

Date: 25 June 2023

Service: Go Church Centurion

Title: His Presence | Our reassurance that God is in our midst!

Time: 9:30am

Prayer:

Anchor Scripture:

Background. The Israelites had just crossed the Red sea and were about to enter the promised land, but before that they needed to cross the river Jordan.

Joshua 3:1-4

1 Then Joshua rose early in the morning; and they set out from Acacia Grove and came to the Jordan, he and all the children of Israel, and lodged there before they crossed over. ² So it was, after three days, that the officers went through the camp; ³ and they commanded the people, saying, “When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the priests, the Levites, bearing it, then you shall set out from your place and go after it. ⁴ Yet there shall be a space between you and it, about two thousand cubits by measure. Do not come near it, that you may know the way by which you must go, for you have not passed this way before.”

What do we know about the ark of the covenant?

- It was regarded as sacred.
- The ark was designed to be a symbol of the presence of God.
- It contained the tablets of the law of God (The Ten commandments).
- The pot of Manna from when the Israelites were in the wilderness was also within the ark.
- It was to remind them of God's love, provision and care.
- The rod of Aaron which symbolised God's given leadership and priesthood was also kept in the ark.

Joshua 3:3. When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the priests, the Levites, bearing it, then you shall set out from your place and go after it.

The ark primarily represented the presence of God, the person of God, the evidence of His existence. So, the Israelites were to move, set-out only when God Himself did so. His presence was to be their guide and they were to follow it closely.

Even in their wilderness era, this was the case:

Exodus 13:21-22. ²¹ And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so as to go by day and night. ²² He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day or the pillar of fire by night from before the people.

The message to the Israelites was clear: Whatever move we are going to make. We're making it with the Lord. We are not going alone. The presence of God, God himself will accompany us. You have not been this way before. You cannot afford to do your own thing. You cannot afford to map out your own routes.

Questions: Is this your consistent demeanour? How relevant is the presence of God in your life, the leading of God in your every move? Do you cherish it and allow it to go before you, particularly if you have never walked that way before?

Sometimes as we journey through life, the horizon may look clear and certain, and it may appear that we know how to navigate our way through the ins and outs of our circumstances. However, we need to open our eyes and trek with God. God's presence is to be our surest guide. We cannot compromise when it comes to the leading and guidance of God. Even if you think you have all your facts.

You see, the presence of God is not necessarily about a feeling or having goose bumps. Yes, sometimes you may feel that. It's about allowing God to come, to appear and takeover and influence the setting. Sometimes He may choose to do so in a very visible manner. This is when His weightiness, chabod, glory, splendour, magnificence descends. Other times it is an inward knowing, assurance that God is here, that He is present in your circumstances. That "it is well" feeling/state.

My prayer for us is that we would consistently allow the Holy Spirit to help us to work with Him more that we may know how to invite God's presence in our daily and moment by moment endeavours. That His presence in our midst would become a lifestyle, a culture our norm.

⁵ And Joshua said to the people, "Sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you."

Sanctify yourselves:

This would consist partly in ceremonial purification, partly in turning to the Lord in a spirit of expectant faith in "the wonders" which "the Lord would do" amongst them. To sanctify, therefore, means "to make holy."

It also meant to separate/divorce oneself from anything unclean and devote oneself fully to God. Uncleaness, sin, bitterness, anger, resentment dispel the anointing of God. News flash, God is Holy and does not dwell where there are filthy attitudes. The presence of God encapsulates the person of God, the nature of God, the power of God. It talks to being surrounded by His arms, God Himself, by His deliverance, His wisdom, knowledge.

Questions: How important is it to you to separate yourself from sin and every form of filth before you come into His presence, in worship, in your quiet time, etc? How often do you intentionally create an atmosphere that attracts the presence of God in your life, family, business, ministry, etc?

⁶ Then Joshua spoke to the priests, saying, "Take up the ark of the covenant and cross over before the people." So, they took up the ark of the covenant and went before the people. ⁷ And the LORD said to Joshua, "This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. ⁸ You shall command the priests who bear the ark of the covenant, saying, 'When you have come to the edge of the water of the Jordan, you shall stand in the Jordan.'"

You shall stand in the Jordan: Obedience attracts the presence of God. It is better than sacrifice.

1 Samuel 15:22. So Samuel said: “Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams.

Where are you standing? Where is your heart positioned? Is it outside the water? Positioning is everything to God. The posture of our hearts matters to God. Our 'location' (as in our state of being), in His purposes is instrumental in determining the traction we gain in Him. God has chosen to partner with us in the fulfilment of His purposes on earth and therefore our obedience is key. God is attracted to obedience. Where there is obedience, His presence, His anointing, His grace. His power, follow.

⁹ So Joshua said to the children of Israel, “Come here, and hear the words of the LORD your God.” ¹⁰ And Joshua said, “By this you shall know that the living God is among you, and that He will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Hivites and the Perizzites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Jebusites:

Jeremiah 10:10

But the LORD is the true God; he is the living God and the everlasting King.

Daniel 6:26

I make a decree, that in all my royal dominion people are to tremble and fear before the God of Daniel, for he is the living God, enduring forever; his kingdom shall never be destroyed, and his dominion shall be to the end.

Living God is in your midst:

God is not dead. He is alive and well. He is seated on the throne. He is actively pursuing His purposes on earth. He is watching over His Word to perform it.

Jeremiah 1:12. Amp. Then the LORD said to me, “You have seen well, for I am [actively] watching over My word to fulfill it.”

Matthew 5:18. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.

God is living!!! His power has not diminished. His wisdom is still intact. His guidance is sure. His understanding is unsearchable. His focus is on point.

This living God is the one Joshua was referring to when He said to the Israelites: **By this you shall know that the living God is among you.** For you, protects you, guides you and fights your battles.

Sometimes as believers we live as though God does not exist.

We lose sight of the reality that He is alive. We forget that God is in our midst.

Deuteronomy 31:6. Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the LORD your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you.”

Notice God’s primary motive was not for them to just see yet another miracle. They had witnessed innumerable miracles in their desert journey in the last 40 years. God wanted to remind them that He is surely in their midst. That there was a living God in their midst...not a dead God...not an imagery God...not a foreign God...but the God of their forefathers...who was still present and living to fulfil His purposes for this generation.

Question: Are you convinced God is in your midst: God is in your family, in the lives of your children. God is in your Church?

The living and Sovereign God is the midst of your business endeavours. The Son of God who defeated death and rose to heaven in for you wants to heal you. The living God carers about your promotion, your studies, your next season. The God who is among you is concerned about the welfare of your children.

¹¹ Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is crossing over before you into the Jordan. ¹² Now therefore, take for yourselves twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one man from every tribe. ¹³ And it shall come to pass, as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests who bear the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of the Jordan, that the waters of the Jordan shall be cut off, the waters that come down from upstream, and they shall stand as a heap.”

It is interesting to note that the soles of the feet of the priests had to be in the place where the miracle was to occur. God's presence (as represented by the ark) was guaranteed for as long as the priests had stepped into the "miracle zone". For as long as their feet were resting in the sphere where the miracle would manifest.

Questions: Which places, "zones" in your life are you wanting miracles to take place? Is it healing you are longing for? Is it some kind of breakthrough? Is it peace?

Then speak God's word as you stand in that place of expectancy. Let your mind and heart be positioned aright. The God who is in your midst, is also the God who heals – Jehovah Rophe. When we speak His word in our circumstances, it carries heavenly power, it creates, it calls those things that are not as though they were, it releases His divine presence, person and nature into that very situation. The principle is that we have to be in the right place at the right time. Right frame of mind regarding faith, hope and trust in the Lord. We have to maintain the right posture pertaining to how we navigate the voices/noises around us especially the negative ones. Our preparedness to allow our hearts to be quickened to the obedience of His instruction, the obedience of His Word is critical.

You see, if you are going to believe God for something then do it with all your might. No half measures. If you are struggling with unbelief in a particular area then pray like the father of the boy with a mute spirit prayed or said to Jesus: Lord help my unbelief.

¹⁴ So it was, when the people set out from their camp to cross over the Jordan, with the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people, ¹⁵ and as those who bore the ark came to the Jordan, and the feet of the priests who bore the ark dipped in the edge of the water (for the Jordan overflows all its banks during the whole time of harvest), ¹⁶ that the waters which came down from upstream stood still, and rose in a heap very far away at Adam, the city that is beside Zaretan. So, the waters that went down into the Sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, failed, and were cut off; and the people crossed over opposite Jericho. ¹⁷ Then the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan; and all Israel

crossed over on dry ground, until all the people had crossed completely over the Jordan.

There is standing, then there is firmly standing.

Question: How firmly are you standing in faith in your circumstances?

When you stand firm, it means even though the waves of the sea lift up their voices you are not moved. **When you are firmly persuaded that God is in your midst, no floods will drown you, no fires will burn, no lions will chew you alive, no armies will conquer you.**

Psalm 93:3-4: The floods have lifted up, O LORD, the floods have lifted up their voice. The floods lift up their waves. The LORD on high is mightier than the noise of many waters, than the mighty waves of the sea.

Hebrews 10:23. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.

When the presence of God surrounds you, fear dissipates, the insurmountable becomes possible. You begin to perceive your circumstances through the very eyes of God who is there (Jehovah Shammah).

Paul put it so aptly:

2 Corinthians 4:8-10. We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed— always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.

Just want to conclude by looking at some keys to cultivating the presence of God in our lives:

1. Repentance

Isaiah 30:15. This is what the Sovereign LORD, the Holy One of Israel, says: “In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength...

God is attracted to repentance. True repentance paves the way for reconciliation with God. A truly repentant heart attracts the presence of God. Repentance is not a once-off activity but something we do every time we miss the mark. It opens the door to communion and intimacy with God and allows the presence to flow into our lives.

2. Brokenness

Isaiah 57:15. For thus says the High and Lofty One. Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: “I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

Brokenness, contrition of heart allow us to dwell with God in the very place He inhabits. These attributes expose us the atmosphere of heaven, to God's holiness. God wants us to dwell with Him and experience heaven on earth. His desire is for us to know Him intimately and allow His presence to captivate us and become the norm in our lives.

3. Humility

1 Peter 5: 5b. God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.

James 4:10. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.

- Humility is a vehicle through which grace abounds toward us.
- Humility drives God to lift us up.
- Humility is something God will never resist.
- It is a weapon made available to us to use to cultivate the presence of God.

4. Obedience:

Philippians 2:8-9

⁸And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. ⁹Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, ¹¹and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

- Even Jesus the Son of God became obedient to His Father to the point of death.
- Obedience is better than any sacrifice one can ever make to the God.
- Obedience invites God into our lives and to dwell with us.
- We need to walk in obedience to God's Word, ways, and by so-doing we cultivate His presence in our lives.

5. Trekking/Walking with the Holy Spirit

John 16: 13-14. ¹³ However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. ¹⁴ He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you.

- The Holy Spirit is part of the God-head and works in sync with the Father and God the Son.
- He has been given to us to walk alongside us.
- He is the Spirit of truth who conveys to us the truth of God.
- He takes of what is the Lord's and declares it to us.

We cannot talk of the presence of God's without making reference to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit and our posture as believers should be to be supple to the working of the Holy Spirit in and through our lives.

6. Consistency in key disciplines:

- Meditating on the Word.

Joshua 1:8. This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success

- Prayer

1 Thes 5:16-18. Rejoice always, ¹⁷pray without ceasing, ¹⁸in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

- Worship of God in Spirit and Truth.

John 4:23 -24. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

Conclusion

- We need to be deliberate about cultivating the presence of the Lord in our lives.
- The presence of God should be our norm, lifestyle and culture and not ad hoc experience.
- It is of paramount importance for us as believers for be fully persuaded that God does surely dwell in our midst and is waiting to show Himself strong on our behalf.
- Our everyday demeanour should reflect that though we live on earth we are backed by the God of the universe, the Almighty God , the God who sits on the throne and is:
- Among us
- Wants His power, presence, his wisdom, understanding, knowledge to be evident in all aspects of our lives.

- Let us step out and refuse to be intimidated by the enemy and his lies and walk in the conviction that God's presence, His magnificence, His splendour is our portion and that our living God surely does dwell in our midst!!!