

Covenant Privilege and Responsibility¹

Jesus won for me the thrilling privilege of living in the presence of God. Moment by moment, day by day, year in and year out, God's people live in His presence.

An understanding of God's covenant promise to be our God, and a realization that this does not depend on our performance but on His provision, ushers us into the glorious truth that we live in His presence. His presence gives us purpose. His presence makes us safe. His presence fills us with joy and love. His presence is our life.

Moses understood this, and he would settle for nothing less. In Exodus 3 we read that he was in the desert, tending the flock of his father-in-law, when "the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. . . . God called to him from within the bush God said, 'Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. . . . I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob'" (Exodus 3:2-6).

Moses was in the desert. He was at work. But he was on holy ground because God was there. Living in the presence of God means that *we are always on holy ground*. His presence makes all of life sacred. For the Christian, there is no division between sacred and secular. All of life is sacred because it is lived for His glory and in His presence. All of life is to be brought under His lordship.

After leading the Israelites out of Egypt and after receiving the Ten Commandments, Moses came down from Mount Sinai and found the people worshiping the golden calf. God told Moses to leave and take the people to the land He had promised. Then God said, "but . . ." and it is what follows this conjunction that makes the critical difference. "But I will not go with you, because you are a stiff-necked people and I might destroy you on the way. When the people heard these distressing words, they began to mourn." (Exodus 33:3-4).

For God to withdraw His presence was reason for distress and mourning. Moses went before God, not because the people deserved it, but because of God's covenant promise.

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."

— Exodus 33:12-13

Moses knew that the line of demarcation was the presence or absence of God. The place would be empty without God's presence. And the only hope for God's presence was that He had promised that He would be their God and they would be His people. The only hope was the covenant. Moses' confidence was His knowledge that God is a covenant-keeper.

The LORD replied, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." Then

¹ Susan Hunt, *Heirs of the Covenant*. (Crossway, 1998; Great Commission Publications, 2014), 33-37.

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 33:14-16

In the remainder of this incredible encounter, Moses asks to see God's glory. God put Moses in a cleft in the rock and covered him with His hand. Then God passed by.

Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD. And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.”

Moses bowed to the ground at once and worshiped. “O LORD, if I have found favor in your eyes,” he said, “then let the LORD go with us. Although this is a stiff-necked people, forgive our wickedness and our sin, and take us as your inheritance.”

Then the LORD said: “I am making a covenant with you. Before all your people I will do wonders never before done in any nation in all the world. The people you live among will see how awesome is the work that I, the LORD, will do for you. Obey what I command you today.”

– Exodus 34:5-11

Then God gave covenant responsibilities. The people were to rid the land of false worship and false worshipers. They were not to coexist with unbelief. Moses was on the mountain forty days. And God wrote on the tablets of stone the words of the Ten Commandments.

The conclusion of this drama is riveting:

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the Testimony in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the LORD.

– Exodus 34:29

The privilege of living in the presence of God results in a radiance of life that cannot be denied. Living in His presence empowers us to reflect the glory of the Glorious One. What an awesome privilege.

What Is My Covenant Responsibility?

Covenant-keeping is evidence of our covenant relationship with God. Covenant-keeping is necessary to enjoy covenant blessings. Obedience does not earn entrance into God's presence. Obedience validates the reality of that relationship. “If you love me, you will obey what I command” (John 14:15).

God has sovereignly drawn us into a relationship with Himself. We have the glorious privilege of living in His presence. Enjoying this privilege requires an intentional, disciplined pursuit.

It means we must “demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5).

It means we are not to “conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. . .” (Romans 12:2).

It means that whether you “eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Living in His presence will distinguish us from all the other people on the face of the earth (Exodus 33:16). When we live in His presence, we see His character. Then we turn and face every human relationship and situation and radiate His character.