

That I May Dwell among Them

Exodus 25:8 And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them.

Philip Hodson

Do you hear the deep yearnings of the heart of God in these beautiful words? This is the exposing of His very deepest of desires: "... that I may dwell among them!" These precious words should bring such joy, comfort, and encouragement to our hearts as we realize that it is God Himself who is longing to dwell among us! If we too share this desire, then let us humbly acknowledge that it is He who yearns for this intimate communion, even more intensely than we ever could. So if we are longing for His presence and communion in our hearts, our homes, and our congregations, then let us know with certainty that, in this pursuit, He is for us! Ro. 8:31

This was the very heart of God in creation, as He created the heavens and the earth and all that is in them. Then at the close of that sixth day He made man, male and female. He created them in His own image and after His own likeness. Ge. 1:26-27, Ge. 2:7-9, Ge. 2:15-18 He carefully and tenderly formed the body of Adam from the dust of the ground and then, placing His own mouth over the cold and lifeless face of Adam, He breathed into his nostrils the very breath of life, and Adam became a living soul! God Himself specially prepared a garden in Eden where He placed the man whom He had made, and in that Garden of Delight and Pleasantness, God walked with Adam and Eve and dwelt in happy and holy communion with them.

We all know well that sad story of how they fell from this wonderful and holy place of intimacy with the Living God, of how they forfeited their rights and privileges to that Garden of Delights, and how they died to the "eternal life" of an intimate knowledge and communion with the Living God (Jo. 17:3), the very life which He had created them to know and possess. Jo. 17:2 The truth of that account is so heartbreaking, but do we realize that the deep yearnings in the heart of God have never changed?

"That I may dwell among them"—this is the heart cry of God throughout both the Law (Ge. 17:7-8, Ex. 25:8, Ex. 29:45-46, Le. 26:11-12, Nu. 35:34) and the Prophets (Je. 31:1, Je. 31:33, Je. 24:7, Je. 30:22, Je. 32:38; Ez. 11:19-20, Ez. 36:28, Ez. 37:27; Ze. 13:9)! This is the express purpose of God in the making the New Covenant: "I will dwell among them and they shall be my people and

I will be their God." Je. 31:31-33, Ez. 11:19-20, Zc. 2:10-11 This heart cry of God can be clearly heard in His declaring the name of Messiah as "Immanuel" or "God with us" (Is. 7:14, Is. 8:8, Mt. 1:23), and as "the Word (who was God) became flesh and dwelt among us!" Jo. 1:14 This vital reality of the intimate presence of God with His people is declared to be the will of God throughout the Gospels and the Epistles! Jo. 14:16-18, Jn. 14:23, 2 Co. 6:16-18, Ro. 8:9, Ro. 8:11, Ep. 3:17-19, Ep. 4:4-6, 2 Ti. 1:14, He. 8:10, 1 Jn. 1:3, 1 Jn. 4:12-15 And then in the closing chapters of the book of the Revelation we see this unrelenting pursuit of God triumphantly realized in words of victory as John writes, "And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God!'" Re. 21:3 This is the will of God and the kingdom of God being fulfilled on earth as it is in heaven! This is what we are to pray for (Mt. 6:10), as this is the unrelenting longing and pursuit of God; and He will be victorious!

I believe that we can now all see undeniably that the heart of God for His people is "that I may dwell among them." The living body of Christ must abide in intimate and unbroken union and communion with her Head. Co. 1:18 The glory of the bride is the presence of her bridegroom.

Jn. 3:29, Is. 61:10, Is. 62:5. The evident and outflowing presence of God is the authenticating mark of a believer (Jn. 7:38, Jn. 14:12), and the preeminent presence of Jesus is the defining reality of His church, His "ekklesia" (Co. 1:18), of which He is the Architect and Builder! Mt. 16:18

In his letter to the church at Ephesus, Paul describes the redemption and salvation of Jesus in the following terms:

For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner [stone]; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit. Ep. 2:18-22

"That I may dwell among them"—this is the heart cry of God throughout both the Law and the Prophets!

This is the essence of New Covenant life which is opened up to us by the blood of Jesus, that we both individually, and collectively as His body, have access to the very throne room of the Everlasting Father (Is. 9:6), and that we are members of His household, and are being fashioned into a holy temple in the Lord, that we should be a dwelling place of God in the Spirit! And at the climax of Paul's preceding prayer it is revealed that we are to "be filled with all the fullness of God!" Ep. 3:19

Can we even begin to see just how deeply the Father longs to truly and intimately dwell in the midst of His people? This is redemption and salvation! This is what Jesus shed His precious blood to give to us! Is this what we are walking in? Is this our present experience as believers? As churches? Oh, may we hunger and thirst for this reality, for this is His good, acceptable, and perfect will (Ro. 12:2), and this is His high calling for us! Ph. 3:14 May we apprehend all that for which Jesus has apprehended us! Ph. 3:12 And may we take heed that we do not neglect so great a salvation! He. 2:3

God dwelling in the midst of His people is not simply a doctrine we are supposed to understand or claim on some theological level, but it is rather to be the evident experience of His people. This was the testimony of the life and ministry of Jesus as "for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him." Jo. 3:2 This was the clear testimony of the disciples at Pentecost (Ac. 2:2-4, Ac. 2:11-12) and throughout the book of Acts. Ac. 5:12, Ac. 14:3 This is the reality which is declared throughout the New Testament. Mk. 16:17-20, 1 Co. 2:4, He. 2:4 And this is the same reality which we see repeated over and over through the history of God's moving among His people, and this is the will of God for us, His people, today!

If we are lacking the vital reality of His presence, then we are at best anemic, or worse, an outward form with no power (2 Ti. 3:5), a mere caricature of what we are called to be, not possessing that which was purchased for us by His blood! The earth is full of religious gatherings and Christian gatherings, but Jesus did not come to merely start a new religion, He came to give abundant eternal life (Jn. 10:10, Jn. 10:28, Jn. 17:2), and to dwell in the midst of His people! God is not evaluating us (as we so often evaluate ourselves and others) on terms of merely liberal/conservative or traditional/contemporary, but rather He evaluates our condition by whether we possess His vital

presence in our midst or not, whether we are intimately knowing and walking with Him and He with us. Mt. 7:22-23 This alone is the difference between death and life! Enough of our apathy and complacency! Enough of our double-mindedness and worldliness! Let us "awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak [this] to your shame!" 1 Co. 15:34 We must be determined to have the real, living presence of Jesus in our midst! This must never be optional, as this is the very definition of New Covenant life and salvation!

When Jesus is in the midst of His people, He will be Himself. He will teach, He will convict, He will forgive, He will cleanse, He will pardon, He will bless, and He will heal. He will call men near to Himself, and the works of His Father will be manifest, revealing that we are in Him and He is in us. Jo. 14:10-12 He desires that our lives and deeds will manifest the reality of His presence. God has never desired that men's faith be in the persuasive words of man's wisdom, but rather in the demonstration of the Spirit of God and of power! 1 Co. 2:4 God's desire for the New Covenant assembly is that outsiders and unbelievers who enter our assemblies would be convicted and convinced, and fall down on their faces and worship God, and report that God is truly among us! 1 Co. 14:24-25

Some argue that such words are heavy, as they make us question our sincerity, our condition, and even our salvation, but let us not quench the Spirit's words, as faithful are the wounds of a friend. Pr. 27:6 Though He wounds, He will heal! Ho. 6:1 These are the very words and convictions which have driven kings (1 Ki. 22:13) and prophets (Is. 6:3-5) into the presence and fullness of God. It is such weighty revelations of neediness which preceded every revival in the Old and New Testament, and every revival of His presence in the midst of His people since. In John Wesley's early years, the churches of Britain were marked by empty form, void of reality. But at the age of 35 he encountered the Living God and knew for himself the joys of His salvation, and then he and others began to cry out for God to move in their midst, and He did just that. That move of God changed the face of individuals, homes, churches, communities, and even nations, and at the end of his life, Wesley's final words were these, "The best of all, God is with us!"

Oh, may we too be able to confidently say these same words. No, they are not comfortable words, but let us not

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avoid them and reject them because they might disrupt our own comfortable personal and church lives, but let us rather turn from our ungodly love of comfort, pleasure, and ease, and receive the burden of these words. And may this burden drive us to our knees and faces before the living God, who has promised that He will hear from heaven and forgive our sins, and heal our land! 2 Ch. 7:14 The weeping will only last for a night, but those who weep will be comforted (Mt. 5:4), and the fullness of His joy will come in the morning (Ps. 30:5), and His morning will surely come, and He will arise with healing in His wings! Ma. 4:2 Remember this is His desire and longing much more than it is our own! This is His salvation and His kingdom, so in closing let us hear Jesus' own words and exhortation to us.

Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Mt. 6:33

And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him? Lu. 11:9-10,13

Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Lu. 12:32

Come to the throne of grace, boldly draw near;

He who would win the race must tarry here.

Whate'er thy want may be, here is the grace for thee,

Jesus thine only plea; Come, Christian, come!

God is for us! Let us draw near! ~

Philip and Tanya Hodson currently serve the Lord Jesus in the Ukraine.