

# The Presence of the Lord: 'The Lord Is With Us'

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*The Presence of the Lord is the most important thing in the world, and spiritual progress is only by His Presence.*

**Scripture:** Exodus 25:8, Numbers 14:28, John 1:14

**Topics:** "The Presence of God", "Spiritual Leadership"

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## Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the paramount importance of the Lord's presence among His people, asserting that no amount of prayer can guarantee it unless conditions align with His will. He illustrates that true spiritual progress is contingent upon being in harmony with God's pattern and being led by the Holy Spirit, rather than relying on human judgment or organization. Sparks warns against the dangers of moving forward without the Lord's guidance, as seen in the Israelites' failure to enter the Promised Land when they acted without His presence. He concludes that the essence of spiritual life is rooted in the recognition and experience of God's presence, which is vital for any meaningful work in the Lord's name.

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## Transcript

Reading: Exodus 25:8; John 1:14:

"And let them make Me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them."

"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth."

We are going to continue this morning with this great desire of God to dwell among men. In our own personal life, in our life together as the Lord's people, in all the work of the Lord, THE MATTER OF GREATEST IMPORTANCE IS THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD. There is nothing so important as the Presence of the Lord. I think we realize that because we pray very much about it. We pray every day that the Lord will be with us. When we come together for our meetings, we pray that the Lord will be with us. When we go to any part of the Lord's work, we pray that the Lord will be with us. But we very rarely realize that no amount of prayer can secure the Presence of the Lord. We may pray all day and all night, and have many nights of prayer for the Presence of the Lord. And we may think that because we pray so much for the Presence of the Lord, that that is going to guarantee that He will be Present. It is not only a matter of how much we pray for this. The Presence of the Lord depends upon whether things are suitable to the Lord. We may pray for the Lord to be Present, but because things are all wrong, the Lord will not be

Present.

No, it all depends upon things being suitable to the Presence of the Lord. There is a sense in which the Lord is not with people. The Lord is only with His Son. And it depends upon how far things are according to Christ, whether the Lord will be Present. When the Lord Jesus said, "Whosoever two or three are gathered into My Name, there I am." It did not mean wherever a few people gather together, and say, "We are here in the name of Jesus." Anybody can say that. All Christian religion says that. Jesus said, "Whosoever two or three are gathered into My Name." THE NAME OF JESUS IS ALL THAT JESUS IS IN HIMSELF. The Name gathers up all that He is. All that He is to God the Father. And all that He is from God the Father to us. See, it is INTO the Name of Jesus. It is being found in what Christ is.

That brings us back to this matter of the Presence of God as in the tabernacle of old. We were seeing yesterday that the Spirit of God took hold of Bezaleel and Aholiab, so that they could fulfill the pattern which had been shown to Moses. Now, you see, you have three things. You have the pattern which had been shown. Then you have the people who are to do the work. Between the pattern and the people is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit takes hold of the pattern. And the Holy Spirit takes hold of the people. And the Holy Spirit makes the people carry out the pattern to the finest detail. All things according to the pattern shown.

Now do you see, why the Holy Spirit takes men off of the natural ground, and puts them onto the spiritual ground? So that the men will not do the work of God with their natural understanding or with their natural strength. They do the work of God by the wisdom and power of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps, one of the things which we take the longest to learn in this work of God is this: It is that God leaves nothing to man's own judgment. I wonder how many of us have really learned that lesson.

You see, some of us had the idea at the beginning that we were called into the work of the Lord. Well, the idea may have been quite right. And then we had our idea as to what the work of the Lord is. And so we got busy about it. We use all our mind and all our strength to do this work of God. We organize the work. And we organize the people. And we appointed this one to do this work, and that one to do that work. We were like the general manager of a big business. And for many years there was very little or real spiritual results. The fruit of all that was spiritually very small. We may have built up big things. People may have said, 'Well, that is a very successful work.' But, as we look back upon it today, we see how poor it was in spiritual value. It is not the number of people. It is not the amount of work. It is not wonderful organization and machinery. It is just how much the Lord is in it. And it is better to have something quite small with the fullness of the Lord in it, than something quite big with just a little of the Lord in it.

Now Bezaleel and Aholiab were given understanding by the Spirit. How important that is. The Holy Spirit is very particular about the work of God. What a lot of trouble and waste of time would be saved if we were really led by the Spirit in what we do.

I give you an illustration from my experience. Many years ago when the Lord was doing something, and it was something that the Lord was doing, a dear man came along and he said, 'I think this is the Lord's work.' And he came to the meetings. And he prayed in the meeting and he was one who had been used to preach in different places. And I thought at one time, Well, it might be a good thing to have this brother in the work. So, I asked him to preach. Well, he did preach. And then I asked him again, and he gradually became a part of the work. But the time came when I realized that that brother had not got the same vision. We who were in that work of God had gone through a very deep experience. We had come to know

something very truly of the work of the Cross. The Cross had broken all our old ideas about preaching and organization. Now this dear brother had never gone that way. He had not come up from the root. He had been added from the outside. The real basic revelation had not come to him. So he was a preacher and a Bible teacher. But the time came, years afterward, when I said: 'Oh, I made a terrible mistake in bringing the brother in.' The day came when he went away. He tried to start some other things. And though we still loved him, and recognized much of the Lord about him, it brought a great deal of trouble and distress among us that he had come into the heart of the work. And when he went away, it meant a lot of difficulty.

Another brother came a little later. This was before I had learned the lesson. He was a dear brother, he really loved the Lord. He had been an evangelist. And he had done some Bible teaching. But he was a lonely man. And he came to me one day and he said, 'You know I feel the need of being a part of something else. I need to have a company of people around my ministry who will pray for me when I go out and where I can find spiritual fellowship.' Oh, in my sympathy for him, in my desire to help a brother, I said: 'Brother, we will provide you with what you need. We will gather around you. We will pray for you. You just find your place amongst us.' He had not grown up from the root. He may have been quite good fruit. But you know, there is a difference between the fruit that grows out of the root, and a piece of fruit that you come and tie on the tree. Now I have no fault to find with that brother. But I lived to see the day when I felt very sorry indeed that ever I had brought him in. He also went away and tried to start something else. And that has caused us quite a lot of trouble. We love him very much, we have no fault to find with him.

But, you see, God was doing something. And those who were connected with that had to come up from the inside. You cannot just put your hand on people, this one and that one and say, come and join us. Come and take up work amongst us. They have to be right in that which God is doing with you. The work of God is an organism, not an organization. And everything has got to grow out of the root. I hope you understand what I mean. It is so important that everything should be in the Spirit and not by man's judgment.

I began these morning meetings by telling you that the Second Letter to Timothy, which is Paul's last letter, was in order to correct things in the house of God. And one of the things that he was correcting there, was elders in the house of God. We are sure that they had already commenced that condition of things, which led to the organization of the Church - in man appointing officials in the church. I do not know whether you can understand the differences between an official and a living organism. Do you understand that difference? See, we have got organisms in our body. We do not call them by official names. They are just living organisms. They function by life. We do not say, 'Now this body needs a heart. Let us go and find the heart somewhere. And we give it some official name and we put it in.' No, the heart grows out of the whole organism. Now in late New Testament times there was this thing beginning, when men began to call elders bishops and archbishops and deacons and then at last popes.

Now that was beginning before Paul finished his ministries. And Paul wrote that letter to Timothy to put that right. In effect, Paul was saying this, "Elders in the church are not just officials. They are not chosen because they are intellectual men. They are not chosen because they are wealthy men. They are not chosen because they have influence in the world. They are not chosen because they are known to be successful businessmen. Elders are elders before ever they are called elders. Do you understand that? It is not the name at all. It is what the man is. And what the man is, is wholly a matter of how much of the Lord is in him. It is the Presence of the Lord which decides what the man is. You can leave out the name if you like. We just use the name for convenience. The name has taken on a meaning which it was never

intended to have. Elders in the church are nothing more and nothing less than spiritual men. Let me repeat, IT IS JUST A MATTER OF HOW MUCH OF THE LORD IS IN THAT MAN.

You see, I am keeping true to the New Testament. Right at the beginning it was like this: 'Choose you out men filled with the Holy Spirit.' That was the thing that decided the man. Whether they were deacons or whether they were elders; whether they were apostles, it was a matter of man filled with the Holy Spirit. You see, the Holy Spirit makes everything according to Christ. And when we meet a true elder, we do not meet the man first, some important man, some very forceful man, some man who has gotten everything in his hand: WE MEET THE LORD JESUS. That is the thing that makes us what we are in any capacity. And these are very important principles. "See, that thou make all things according to the pattern shown." And although the people were to do the making, they could only do it by the power of the Holy Spirit. If it is not like this, there will be a waste of time, and a waste of strength.

Several years ago, I was having a long talk with a leader of a great world movement. It was something that had a very blessed and beautiful beginning. God raised up a servant of His, and took that man through a very deep experience, then began to use him in this work. It became a world wide work. Many of you would know about it if I mentioned his name. But you need not ask, I shall not tell you. The thing is that in its early years it was a great spiritual power. I think it was one of the most spiritual things God has done in the last hundred years. But today it has lost its original power. It goes on; it is a big worldwide evangelical movement. It has hundreds of churches all over the world, but it has lost its original spiritual depth. It is quite different today in its character from what it was in the early years. Now I was having a talk with one of the leaders of this work, and he was deploring this loss of spiritual life in the work. He was very sad about it. And he said to me, 'Mr. Sparks, what would you do?' And that was a very big question to ask any man. So I had to think for a moment, and then I said, 'I think this is what I would do. I would call all the leaders together, and take them right away from all the work, and for two or three weeks I would wait on God. I would ask them to seek the Lord to recover the original vision and life.' He said, 'Mr. Sparks, you are right, that is the only thing to do.' But then he said, 'It cannot be done.' I said, 'Why?' 'They are all too busy. You see, we have got into something which so takes up our time and our strength that we have not the time to keep our spiritual life deep and strong.'

That brings me back to another very, very important thing about this tabernacle in the wilderness. Not only did all things have to be made according to the pattern, but when that was done, the people set forth led by the testimony. The tabernacle was taken down, and all its parts were put upon the shoulders of the Levites, and the camp went forward. Well, that is very good, we like to think of that. But it was not long before the Lord said, 'STOP, we are not going on, put up the tabernacle again, and stay here till I say MOVE!' That happened again and again. I wonder why that was. You know, we cannot get things on our shoulders, and we cannot go on, and just keep going on. The Lord says: 'Stop, I want you to have a further understanding of My Son. I want you to understand that progress is only by My Presence. You have got to gather round this tabernacle, but realize that I am Present there in the midst. Now, for a time you have got to be occupied with Me. So far, you have been occupied with getting on; but I say STOP, and be occupied with Me for a little while.' The point is, that spiritual progress is always a matter of the Presence of the Lord, and of our understanding what that presence means. So if it happens in our lives that the Lord sometimes says, 'Stop, stop all your going on, stop all your activities, stop all your work, be still and know that I am God. Be occupied with Me for a little while.' Progress, spiritual progress is only by THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD.

You know, when the people came to the border of the promised land, they refused to go over and take the land because they heard from those who had spied out the land that there were giants in the land (Numbers 14). Therefore they would not obey and follow the Lord. Then the Lord said to Moses: "Say unto them, 'As I live, saith the Lord, surely as ye have spoken in Mine ears, so will I do to you: your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, that have murmured against Me, surely ye shall not come into the land, concerning what I swore that I would make you dwell therein, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun. But your little ones, that ye said should be a prey, them will I bring in, and they shall know the land which ye have rejected. But as for you, your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness. And your children shall be wanderers in the wilderness forty years, and shall bear your whoredoms, until your dead bodies be consumed in the wilderness'" (Numbers 14:28-33; ASV).

When Moses spoke these words to all the sons of Israel, the people mourned greatly. And they rose up the next morning and they said, "We have sinned, but we will go up to the place which the Lord has promised." But Moses said, "Why then are you transgressing the commandment of the Lord, when it will not succeed? Do not go up, lest you be struck down before your enemies, for the Lord is not among you. For the Amalekites and the Canaanites will be there in front of you, and you will fall by the sword, inasmuch as you have turned back from following the Lord. And the Lord will not be with you." The people said, 'We are going over.' And the Lord said, 'No.' But they said, 'We will go over, we are going on.' The Lord said, "I AM NOT GOING ON." And they went on, or tried to go on, and it was a most disastrous thing. And at the end of forty years they all died in the wilderness, just as the Lord had said (Num. 14:41-43; NASB).

It is a dangerous thing to go on without the Lord. We can only go on if we know that the Lord is with us. And so in all our activity, it is very important that we know that the Lord is in what we are doing, that we are not going ahead of the Lord.

It is just as dangerous not to go when the Lord does go. Supposing on one of those days when the priests sounded the silver trumpets, sounded that call on the trumpets which said, 'Today, we move on, today the Lord is going on.' Supposing the people said, 'Oh, well, I am not going. I am going to stay here, I am not going to move.' All right, the Lord would have gone up, and they would have been left alone in the wilderness without the Lord. See it works both ways. The Lord is going on, we must go on. The Lord says, 'Wait a little while, and get a new knowledge of Myself.' Then we must be prepared to wait. You see, I am giving you the foundation principles of life with God.

I think I am going to finish there this morning. I have said a lot of things. I do not want them all to be lost in the mass. I want you to be able to see this because that is a vital factor in the Presence of the Lord. It is not always what we think the Lord wants to do. We must bring our thoughts into the Presence of the Lord. 'Lord, it would be a good thing for me to go to such and such a place. I think they need me there. Indeed, they have invited me to come, and it seems to me to be quite good if I were to go.' Is that all that you have to consider? We have got to bring all that back to the Lord, and we have to say, 'Lord, do you want me there, and do you want me there at this time? If I get out of the Lord's time, I am going to waste time. Perhaps the Lord means it for next year. If I do it now, I have wasted a whole year.' You see what I mean? This is life in the Spirit, and the Lord can only be with us as we live in the Spirit.

Now, we are not perfect, we make our mistakes. I have told you a mistake that I have made. It was not because I had not got a heart for the Lord, it was not because I was not very jealous for the Lord, but you

see I had not learned the lessons in the school of Christ. I have told you at the beginning that I was just going to bring you some of the lessons that I had learned in that school. I have learned them by failure, and I have learned them by suffering. God is very practical. You see, God never puts a textbook into our hands and says, 'Now you study that textbook and do things just as in the textbook.' Oh no, God never does it like that, that would be easy. Perhaps we would like it like that, but God teaches us by experience. He leads us into situations, and then we learn His deep lessons, that is the only way in which we really learn. True knowledge is the knowledge which comes by experience. Somebody else may write a textbook; they come along to you with the textbook. They say, now this is the textbook of the New Testament church, and you have got to do everything as we put it down here, and it is not long before you find yourself in a lot of confusion.

The Holy Spirit is our textbook, He knows it all. He has got all the principles, and it is only as we live in the Spirit that we learn by experience. But there is some value in our being able to tell you these things. I do not say to you now do this because I tell you to do it. I tell you that this is what I believe to be the way of the Lord. You give heed to it. You let the Spirit teach you, try to remember these things and they may save you from a lot of the trouble that I have had. But it all comes back to one thing, THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD. That is the most important thing in the world. It is truly a great thing to be able to say, "The Lord is with us."

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