

The Companion of the Way

by

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INTRODUCTION

THE PERPETUAL PRESENCE

The ultimate longing of the redeemed soul is for GOD Himself. Nothing less than the experience of the divine presence can ever satisfy the heart that has tasted of His grace. GOD did not create man to be independent of Him, but to need Him always. He did not endow him with that mysterious gift which we call personality, and with faculties spiritual, moral, and mental, that he should tread life's highway alone. It was His design that the personality should find its purpose in the fellowship of the giver, and the faculties their utmost meaning in the carrying out of His benign will.

Though sin has challenged this relationship of CREATOR and creature and has spread its pollution throughout the centuries of man's history, yet whenever the heart has known the divine forgiveness, the basic need of GOD's presence has reasserted itself. The longing of the soul has found its expression in many a cry recorded in the Scriptures. We listen to some of these, as psalmist, lawgiver, and disciples speak with words whose intensity betokens the stirring of the depths of need and of desire.

"My soul thirsteth for thee" (Psalm 63:1).

"My heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God" (Psalm 84:2).

"If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence" (Exodus 33:15).

"Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent" (Luke 24:29).

In these we recognize far more than the urgency of the immediate circumstances which brought them to utterance. Those whose lips framed the petitions spoke -- though unknown to themselves -- for all GOD's people at all times. In their words we have our share, even as in their emotion

we feel the throbbing of our own heart. But they were more than spokesmen; they are our kinsman in the family of GOD. Their language is ours, though it is the speech of heart rather than of lip.

In spite of the different scenes attendant upon different eras of history, the answer to all such longing, as far as our mortal condition can receive answer, is in the sublime fact of the perpetual presence of GOD with His people. As we read and reread the books of Scripture, we become deeply conscious that through sunshine and through shadow, through storm and through calm, there has stood with His own, and walked with them, One whose faithfulness has never faltered and whose love has never waned. "**Behold, I am with thee . . . I will not leave thee**" was his word to Jacob at Bethel (Genesis 28:15), and the promise was repeated to Joshua: "**Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the Lord thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee**" (Deuteronomy 31:6) and "**Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I swore unto their fathers to give them**" (Joshua 1:6), and to Solomon: "**And David said to Solomon his son, Be strong and of good courage, and do it: fear not, nor be dismayed: for the Lord God, even my God, will be with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee, until thou hast finished all the work for the service of the house of the Lord**" (I Chronicles 28:20). It has been given to us also who have been drawn by the surpassing attraction of our adorable Saviour to press on to the city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is GOD.

At times the divine presence has been made visible to the eyes of men. In varying circumstances of place, of age, and of need, men subject to like passions as we are have had the all-transcending experience of seeing GOD. They have seen Him not in the full blaze of the light of Deity -- that vision of His face which no mortal can bear -- but in guise suited alike their frailty and to His ways of grace and government with them, and with us too, for whom these things are recorded in the Word. While these appearances differ in their setting, they are one in their purpose to life the gaze of the soul from the temporal to the eternal, and from the vanities of earth to that ultimate reality which is GOD Himself.

Looking back on the Old Testament in the light of the New, we find that the theophanies of the ancient Scriptures were all Christophanies, i.e., it was always in the Son that GOD revealed Himself to men. In certain cases, the New Testament gives express confirmation of this, as, e.g., in the appearing of the "I AM" to Moses in the burning bush and in that to Isaiah when the prophet listened to the homage of the seraphim. Beyond this, the general truth may be learned from the teaching of the New Testament concerning the uniqueness of the place of the Son in the Trinity of GOD. He is the image of the invisible GOD (Colossians 1:15), the One in whom that which is otherwise invisible in GOD becomes visible to the creature, not indeed as a result of the Incarnation, but because of the essential relationships in the Godhead. Again, that which is made known of GOD in the theophanies is ever consonant with that which is taught directly concerning the Son. The One who appeared in Old Testament days spoke and acted as being personally GOD, even to the acceptance of worship; nevertheless He appeared in relation to another who was called GOD. This is illustrated in the use of the title "**Angel of the Lord.**" These things find their harmony in CHRIST, the only begotten Son, Himself the Word of GOD, the brightness of GOD's glory, and the express image of His person.

The appearance of the Lord described in the Scriptures are not to be considered merely as things isolated and as events entirely apart from the normal course of the path of faith, but as illustrative to us of the wealth of that sacred companionship which every believer is called to know. The appearances are recorded to show who it is that abides with us, and what His power is to sustain, to encourage, to deliver, and to transform.

Though today we see not our Lord save as He is known to the eye of faith, His presence is none the less real. He has not forgotten His beloved people, nor failed to be with them. He has accompanied with them, not generally, but even individually, so that each one has had reason to count the promises made good to him. Throughout the centuries he has stood with His redeemed ones, ever loving, ever patient, ever true. They have all proved it -- the martyr in the fiery flame; the ill person with fevered brow, restless and weary; the widow bereft in one hour of husband and of stay; and the tired servant, witnessing in some foreign land. They, too, have proved His presence who on the dizzy heights of prosperity and success have been preserved from false steps, and they also who have found the happiest relationships of earth enriched and ennobled by the unseen presence. And have they not proved it also, who have known the horrors of modern warfare and the long, long hours of the nerve-racking blitz?

CHRIST reveals Himself supremely to hearts that count Him precious. He yearns to show them His face and to light up their lives with His constant smile. He is not reluctant to bless, but desires His people to be blessed. When the soul with set purpose puts CHRIST before all else, the sense of His presence deepens through life. Memories of His grace and faithfulness recur with their encouragement and with their rich incentive to lean more fully upon Him and to count upon His nearness in every trying hour. Thus the perpetual presence, known and enjoyed, will manifest itself as an abiding CHRIST-consciousness.

The first moments of thought that begin each new morning will be: "**When I awake, I am still with thee**" (Psalm 139:18). Though the burden of the day challenge the soul with temptation and with care, it will do so only to find the soul ensheathed with an invisible mantle, even Him who has become the soul's retreat and hiding place. The joys of life will be doubled because shared with Another who will add His own portion to the feast spread for Him. Prayer will be no wearisome routine, but such free and intermittent conversation -- though reverent and holy -- as only true friends know. The hour of retiring to rest will be serene with the knowledge that even though the thoughts be hushed in sleep, the Presence will not be withdrawn. Then, should it please GOD that the gates of death should open, the soul will prove that when companions of the pilgrimage can journey with it no longer, He will still be near, and dearer than ever, till the veil be passed, and the soul catch its first wondering sight of His blessed face.

In the following pages there are selected for meditation nine glimpses of the sacred presence given in the Old Testament, together with the three instances in the New Testament where the Lord JESUS CHRIST was seen by men on earth in His post-ascension glory. Taken together, they show something of what He has been to His saints throughout their history, but all that He has been He remains today, and shall remain forever. Moreover, because it is the same Person whom they display, and the same deep interest in the welfare of man's soul, they add their clear witness to the unity of Scripture and the continuity of its narrative. One face looks out upon us from its pages; one heart yearns over us with indescribable longing.

When at last we are at home with Him, we shall see Him to be the One who, unseen, often communed with us, as He did with Abraham His friend, who wrestled with us as with Jacob -- and with like ennobling touch, and who sought not to consume but to irradiate with His beauty, as in the bush which Moses saw.

We shall see Him as the One who gave victory over the foe, as He gave it to Joshua, and who succored us in depths of discouragement, as He succored Elijah under the juniper tree.

We shall see Him as the One who prepared us for service, revealing and purging our iniquity, as He did with Isaiah, and who strengthened us in that service in the loneliest day, as He did Ezekiel.

We shall know Him as the One who walked with us in our fiercest trial, as He did with the three Hebrews, and whose revelation was the consummation of life, as it was with Daniel.

Then we will find that it was no mirage of earth that comforted us but the sight of Jesus "**on the right hand of God,**" as Stephen saw Him; that it was "**the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ**" which was the treasure we carried in earthen vessels, as in Paul's experience. Then we will find that behind all the mystery of life, sufficient for every care and for every toil, there stood the First and the Last, the Chief Steward, as He stood with John in Patmos.

With such realization and such company we shall be wonderfully at home in Heaven. Events of earth that once seemed so strange will be understood then as truly preparatory to that bliss. No longer through a glass darkly, but face to face, we shall behold Him in whose presence we have ever been in our pilgrimage, GOD's glorious Son, in whom GOD will be fully known.

There no stranger - GOD shall meet thee --
Stranger thou in courts above --

He who to His rest shall greet thee,
Greets thee with a well-known love.

It is our purpose to consider each of these records (save that of Paul's experience, which was fivefold) from three aspects. We must notice

- (1) The setting in which the appearance was vouchsafed,
- (2) The revelation of the Person and ways of the heavenly Companion,
and
- (3) The blessing that followed in the life.

Thus may we perceive for our comfort and our cheer precious lessons of His grace to us, with whom He still walks unseen. Shall not our hearts fill with richer praise as we remember His faithfulness and lovingkindness, yesterday, today and forever?

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