

Open your Bibles to Exodus 13:17-22.

- We're continuing our study of the book of Exodus.
- This morning our theme is "God's Presence with His People."

In our text today, we'll read of how God led the Israelites through the wilderness in a Pillar of Cloud and Fire.

- He guided them. And He was with them. He was with them personally for their good.
- And He wanted them to SEE it and KNOW it.

You see, God didn't just save Israel from slavery in Egypt.

- He also saw to it PERSONALLY that they made it to the land He had promised them (Canaan).
- So in this text, we'll be reminded that God leads the ones He saves.
- His literal leading of Israel was a picture of how He is present with every believer as they journey through life, SO THAT they make it home to Heaven.

So in this sermon, I want to offer comfort to every believer.

- Christian, your God is with you! He is present with every one of us who trust in Christ.
- And with His presence comes blessing and comfort

and security, because He loves His People.

We all need encouragement from time to time.

- I know that some of us could really use some today.
- You've endured great loss. You're mourning the death of a loved one.
- You're dealing with difficulties in your house with your spouse or children.
- You're staring down some kind of trial at work.
- A family-wide conflict is in the making.
- Your reputation is being threatened.
- You're confused and aren't sure what step to take or what's going to come next.
- Or maybe you're just kind of beaten down and need the Lord to remind you that He loves you.

To all these needs and more, I believe this text provides ground for solid comfort.

- Because in it, we see that we're not alone. But our great and glorious God stands beside us, speaks to us, and guides us through it all.
- Friends, you're not alone. The Lord is with you.
- May God bless the preaching of His Word and put that truth deep in our hearts today.

If you would, and are able, please stand with me now for the reading of the inspired, inerrant, and

infallible Word of God.

Exodus 13:17-22

[17] When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near. For God said, “Lest the people change their minds when they see war and return to Egypt.”

[18] But God led the people around by the way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea. And the people of Israel went up out of the land of Egypt equipped for battle.

[19] Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for Joseph had made the sons of Israel solemnly swear, saying, “God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones with you from here.”

[20] And they moved on from Succoth and encamped at Etham, on the edge of the wilderness.

[21] And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night.

[22] The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people.

(PRAY)

God of All Comfort,

•Thank you for your Word that is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.

•Make that Lamp shine brightly in our hearts today, by the power of your Holy Spirit.

•Help us to understand and, most of all, BELIEVE what you've revealed in your Word.

•Show us your love for your People. Show us how you're with us for Christ's sake.

•And grant that we would hide these truths in our hearts, that we might endure every trial to the glory of your Name.

•Speak to us this morning in the preaching of your Word.

•And glorify yourself as you work in our hearts today.

•We ask these things in Jesus' Name and for His sake.

•Amen.

1.)Our text begins with vv17-18:

•“When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near. For God said, ‘Lest the people change their minds when they see war and return to Egypt.’ But God led the people around by the way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea. And the people of Israel went up out of the land of Egypt equipped for battle.”

•Catch that! v17: “God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines...” v18: “But God led the people...”

•There’s the big point I want you to see: GOD LED HIS PEOPLE.

•He didn’t leave them to their own devices after getting them out of Egypt. He took them by the hand, so to speak, and led them HIMSELF.

•Nothing was left to chance. He was going to see them through and get them to Canaan.

Now, the Israelites probably expected God to take them straight to the Promised Land in the simplest way possible.

•But that wasn’t God’s plan. He didn’t take them on the simplest route.

The fastest route would’ve been “by way of the land of the Philistines.”

•It was a northern route out of Egypt that went toward Canaan along the Mediterranean Coast.

•It was the shortest and most convenient route. But it was heavily guarded by Egyptians forts in addition to the presence of Philistines along the border.

•So God decided to not lead them that way, “although that was near.”

Why? “For God said, ‘Lest the people change their minds when they see war and return to Egypt.’”

- God knew the Israelites weren't ready to face the hardships of war.

- They were newly free, unaccustomed to war, and untrained to fight. It would've been too much for them. So God kept them from it.

Now, God could've taken away the obstacles in their path. He could've knocked out the Philistines and the Egyptians forts with no problem.

- But that wasn't His will. He decided to deal with Israel in ordinary ways in this regard, instead of more miracles. (That's His decision.)

- He didn't want them to endure war yet. That would come later for them.

- So we see that this was MERCIFUL for God to do.

God knew that the Israelites were so weak in faith at this point that they would've returned to slavery if they had to fight.

- God knows His People. He knows the ugly truth of our weakness and unbelief.

- AND YET, He has mercy. He doesn't put us through things we're not yet equipped for by His grace.

God had no intention of losing the ones whom He

had saved. So He guided them in a different way.

- He led them into the wilderness toward the Red Sea.
- That was a route that didn't make sense if speed was the purpose. But it was the way God had chosen.
- God had a plan to get glory over Egypt at the Red Sea.
- So in this odd, unforeseen route, we see that the LORD was working out a plan for His glory and His People's good.
- But the Israelites wouldn't have realized it at the time.

God had a plan.

- God was leading them.
- And God's route was the wisest one.

Now we come to v19:

•“Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for Joseph had made the sons of Israel solemnly swear, saying, ‘God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones with you from here.’”

•This seems like an interruption to the narrative and a random piece of information. But, actually, it fits.

•Back in Genesis 50:24, Joseph said to his brothers, “I am about to die, but God will visit you and bring you up out of this land to the land that He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.”

- And in light of that, Joseph made them swear to take

his remains and rebury him in the Promised Land.

Hebrews 11:22 says that Joseph did this BY FAITH.

- He trusted in God's covenant promise to free Israel from slavery and give the land of Canaan to them.

- He knew God is faithful. So he gave direction about his bones as an expression of his faith.

And this is in our text because taking the bones of Joseph was also a sign of FAITH.

- A sign of faith that God was GOING TO GET THEM TO THE PROMISED LAND.

- How did it signify that? Because they had to get there in order to keep the vow to Joseph. And the bones were taken in order to keep the vow.

- It was a sign that they trusted God to guide them home.

- Think about it this way: If God was faithful to work the Exodus, then surely He'll be faithful to bring them into the land. It was all ONE PROMISE.

Now we turn to vv20-21:

- “And they moved on from Succoth and encamped at Etham, on the edge of the wilderness. And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them

light, that they might travel by day and by night.”

- The LORD led them by a Pillar of Cloud and Fire.
- It was just one Pillar: By day, a cloud. By night a continual fire.
- Clouds and fire are often mentioned in relation to the presence of God.
- Think of Mt. Sinai: Thick, dark clouds and burning fire on the mountain when God descended upon it.

Referring to this Pillar, Psalm 105:39 says, “He [God] spread a cloud for a covering and fire to give light by night.”

- So this Pillar not only went before them, but was a covering for them in the day, too. It protected them from the burning sun of the desert day.
- And by night, it was a comfort to them, giving them light in the darkness.
- This Pillar wasn’t just for leading. It was for protection and comfort.
- It made the hardship of the desert more bearable for God’s People.

And that’s fitting because the Pillar of Cloud and Fire was a THEOPHANY.

- A theophany is a visible manifestation of the presence of God.
- Now, God is omnipresent and can’t be bound to any

particular location. BUT sometimes He makes His presence specially known in a particular place.

- That's what this Pillar is. The text says, "the LORD went before them by day IN a pillar of cloud...and by night IN a pillar of fire..."

- It was GOD HIMSELF.

The Pillar was a sign of God's presence.

- What an encouragement this would've been for them! God Himself was among them!

- God Himself was guiding, leading, protecting, and comforting them!

- He wanted them to know He was there with them. That they weren't alone.

The Pillar was a public revelation of God's presence.

- But it was ALSO a public revelation of His WILL.

- How? Because it revealed where God WILLED THEM TO GO.

- When the Pillar moved, the people followed. Wherever it went, they went. Wherever it stayed somewhere, they set up camp.

- Numbers 9:16-18 says, "At the COMMAND of the LORD the people of Israel set out, and at the COMMAND of the LORD they camped."

- The movement of the Pillar was the "command of the

LORD.”

- God was showing them where to go and what to do every single day.

See this: God was with them.

- He didn't send a substitute. He went with them HIMSELF to guide, protect, comfort, and preserve them.

- The God who saved them was the God who led them.

And now we come to our final verse:

- “The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people.”

- It didn't depart from them.

- Now, don't read this and think, “It didn't depart from them until they got to the Red Sea.”

- No. It did not depart from them FOR FORTY YEARS!

- The Israelites wandered the wilderness for forty years. And God guided them the entire time.

- The Pillar didn't depart until they REACHED THE PROMISED LAND.

He never left them. He never abandoned them.

- He led them ALL THE WAY HOME.

- He was faithful. Just as Joseph and Moses knew He would be. For He can be nothing less.

- God led His People.

2.) Now, what can we learn from this?

- God is present with His People.
- He is with the ones He saves.
- And with His presence comes great blessing.
- His literal leading of Israel to the Promised Land is a picture of how He leads every believer as they journey through life, SO THAT they make it home to Heaven.

My dear brothers and sisters, our God has saved us from the Egypt of sin through His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

- He gave His Son to be our perfect representative. To be our Substitute. To be the Mediator between God and man.

- The Lord Jesus lived in our place, meriting our righteousness before God.

- He died in our place, suffering the wrath of God that was due to us for our sins.

- And He was risen in our place, the firstfruits of the resurrection of the dead for all who trust in Him.

We've been rescued from God's wrath against our sin.

- We've been freed from the tyranny of sin, Satan, and death through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus

Christ.

- We've been justified, declared legally righteous in God's sight, by receiving Christ by faith alone. (Faith that God worked in us by His Holy Spirit!)

- We've been adopted by God, made His children, through faith in Christ.

- God has claimed us as His own. He has promised us eternal life for Christ's sake.

I point out these things to remind you that GOD HAS DONE ALL THESE THINGS.

- We're merely recipients of His amazing grace.

- We've earned nothing. God has freely given.

- We've done nothing. Our Triune God has done all the work on our behalf.

Now, God did not take the time and, so to speak, put forth the effort to redeem us, to then leave us by ourselves and to our own devices.

- He did not send His Son to die for you, to then abandon you to the wilderness and tell you to figure things out.

- The blood of Christ is too precious for that!

- God's honor is too great for that!

- His love for you is too strong and perfect for that!

God has PROMISED that we who trust in Christ

will receive every single blessing that Christ purchased by His blood.

- And only those who persevere to the end will receive every blessing.

- So guess what that means? HE MUST LEAD US HOME.

- He must go with us! He must guide, protect, comfort, encourage, and give every grace we need along the way. Because if He doesn't, we won't make it.

- But, as Joseph and Moses knew, God is faithful. So we will make it. And we'll make it because He'll go with us.

God says to each one who believes,

- “I've saved you. You're not a slave anymore. You're not under my wrath anymore. You're my child in Christ. Now, let's go home. I'll lead the way. You follow me.”

What good news it is to know that God didn't save us and make us His People to then just leave us to fend for ourselves in the wilderness.

- We'd die there! We'd spiritually die in this life. We're too weak to do anything on our own.

- Praise God, He doesn't leave our making it to the Promised Land, Heaven, up to our abilities.

- He loves us too much for that!

- So He'll walk with us until we receive the fullness of

every promise He's made us in Christ: Eternal life, eternal glory, and eternal joy with Him.

The moment we believed, God put His Holy Spirit within us.

- So, quite literally, He is present with His People.
- His hand is always upon us. He is always with us.
- And His presence within us and all around us results in many blessings and comforts FOR US.
- So we're going to consider some of them now.

3.) First, God is Present to Guide Us by His Providence, for Our Good.

•In v17, we read that God didn't lead the Israelites one way, but led them by another way. And He had a reason for it. A reason they couldn't foresee or know.

•Their journey was already mapped out in the mind of the All-Wise God. The trip was already planned by divine decree. And He guided them in mercy.

•He led them in the right way. Though it wasn't the most straightforward way, or the way that would've made sense to them at the time.

•But it was the best way, planned by God, for their good.

Friends, our God does the same for us. But it's by His invisible hand of Providence.

- He's already determined all our days and all events that happen in them.

- God is sovereign. And He executes His eternal decree in history by His Providence. He governs all things. And that includes our journey through the wilderness of life.

- There is not one thing that befalls you that hasn't been mapped out on God's charts for your life.

- There's not one battle, one trial, one loss, or even one success or blessing that hasn't been determined already.

- Your God's Hand is upon you. He is with you. His fingerprints are all over your life.

And, brothers and sisters, He's guiding you in the right way, EVEN IF THAT WAY DOESN'T SEEM TO MAKE THE MOST SENSE AT THE TIME.

- Just as it was with the Israelites, the long route is the best route, if that's where God leads.

- The wilderness route, with all its difficulties, is best, if that's where God has determined you should go.

He knows what He's doing. He has a plan. He has reasons for guiding your life the way He does.

- He had many reasons for leading the Israelites to the Red Sea: To keep them from early war, to drown the Egyptians in the Sea, to give them a private place in the

wilderness to receive His Law, to display His goodness in providing for them in the wilderness, to teach them faith and humble them through trials. .

- All these things were for their good and His glory!
- They had no idea that these were the reasons for going the harder route.
- But God knew what He was doing, even though the way didn't seem make sense to them at the time.

Friends, God knows what we can't. So He guides us in the right way.

•He leads us in mercy. Keeping us from those things that would destroy us. And allowing us to suffer those things that will ultimately grow us and increase our faith and reveal Him to us more and more clearly.

•He is with us. And He has no intention of losing us. So even though the path may be hard, we can rest in the fact that He's guiding us in the right way.

•So let Him lead! Your life is in His hands. Your journey has already been charted. And He knows what He's doing.

4.) Second, God is Present to Lead Us by His Word and Spirit.

•When the Pillar moved, it was God's command to the Israelites. The Pillar was a revelation of His will.

•And we have a revelation of His will for our daily lives

in the Word of God, aided by the work of the Spirit.

- God practically and daily leads us. He gives us wisdom and direction in the Scriptures, telling us where to walk, how to live, what He would have us do.

In the Scriptures, we see His commands.

- He gives us black and white commands that cover much of life.

- He gives us broad principles that we're to apply with wisdom, guided by His Spirit.

- And He gives us new patterns of thinking that, over time, inform every aspect of our lives.

Our God hasn't left us to ourselves to figure out the best way to live. He's not left us to figure out what He would have us do.

- He's given us a sufficient, inerrant, inspired, and infallible Word.

- All we need to know about salvation and living a life that honors Him is found in the Book!

You don't know what to do? Then read and study!

- The answers are there. I promise they're there.

- God didn't lie when He said that His Word fully equips us for every good work.

- You need wisdom? Look to the Book! It's full of practical advice for every day.

It's been said many times that a Christian went to his pastor and said, "I wish God would speak to me."

- The minister replied, "Read the Bible. God speaks there."

- The man said, "No. I mean that I want God to speak to me audibly."

- The pastor replied, "Then read the Bible out loud."

- Brothers and sisters, God's guidance is found in His Word. So use it! That's why He gave it to you!

- He hasn't left you without instruction. Look to the Pillar of the Word and see where He would have you go.

And He's given you His Holy Spirit, who works through the Scriptures.

- The Book commands. And the Spirit, who dwells within you, gives you the ability to listen, believe, and apply what you read.

- He gives you the proper affections, the right heart-attitude to heed God's Word.

- He's given you a new nature that desires obedience.

- He makes the Scriptures bright in your heart, that you might savingly understand them.

- And He empowers you to walk in the ways of God. To do things that unbelievers cannot: Obey God.

- And that's not even to mention the subjective acts of conviction and personal prompting that He gives His children.

We aren't wandering without direction.

- God guides us by His Word and Spirit so we can know where to go.

- So, brothers and sisters, be encouraged!

- God meets you at His Word to lead you.

5.) Third, God is Present to Protect Us.

- The Pillar of Cloud covered them, even as it led them.

- It shielded them from the harsh desert sun. And it even protected them from enemies at times, like it did at the Red Sea when the Egyptians came upon them.

Dear ones, God is with you to guard you.

- He watches over you and stands beside you that you might not faint in the wilderness. That you might not be overcome by the world, the flesh, and the Devil.

- He might not keep us from all physical suffering. He might not keep us from all anguish of soul.

- But He does stand guard over our souls, that we might not die in the wilderness.

Brothers and sisters, the God of Israel "will neither

slumber nor sleep.” (Psalm 121:4)

- “The LORD is your keeper; the LORD is your shade on your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD will keep you from all evil; He will keep your life.” (Psalm 121:5-7)

- He will not permit your soul to be lost. He is with you to protect you.

He knows what temptations and trials would cause you to fall away, if left on your own.

- He knows the malice of Satan, and how he desires to tear you to pieces, and could do it if you were put under his power.

- He knows your weakness. What would cause you to walk away from Christ.

- But He has no intention of losing you. He’s covenanted with you in Christ to save you.

- So He keeps you from such things.

There are trials, yes. No denying it.

- But we are never completely overcome.

- The fire of faith may become a smoldering ember in your heart. But He will never let it be put out completely.

- He’ll cover that ember with His omnipotent hands and keep the winds and waters of life from extinguishing it.

He tells Satan, as He did with Job, “You may do

this to him/her. But no more.”

- He tells the world, “You may bring this hardship. But no further.”

- And at just the right time, the Almighty Pillar stands between us and our enemies to deliver us, lest we perish.

- When the wilderness and our enemies threaten to overtake us, the LORD simply won't allow it.

- In some way, He will intervene that we might continue the journey.

Brothers and sisters, do you feel as if you're going to be overcome by your enemies?

- That you're an inch away from going back to the world?

- That you're moments away from faith dying in your heart?

- Look to the Pillar! Look to God! Cry out to Him!

- And say with the Apostle, “The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into His heavenly kingdom. To Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.” (2 Timothy 4:18)

6.) Fourth, God is Present to Comfort Us.

- The Pillar was FIRE at night.

- Have you ever been in a desolate place at night? It's cold. Darkness encircles you. Every rustling noise

becomes a terror.

- What a comfort it is for someone to light a fire. The warmth and light make the night more bearable.

- Our God is a Pillar of Fire in the night of life for His People. He comforts us in the darkness.

Night follows day. Darkness is part of life.

- We all must endure it from time to time.

- Our faith becomes weak. Our losses are great. The pain is horrible. We fear what sufferings might lie ahead.

- Some of us have spent a lot of time in the dark.

- But God is with you, Christian. He hasn't abandoned you to the dark night of the soul.

His promises give you comfort.

- That all you lose in this life will be restored tenfold in the world to come.

- That whatever you lose here is nothing compared to what you will gain in glory.

- That, though your body wears out here, you will receive a new one someday.

- That one glorious day all the hardships of life will make sense. You'll see how God was at work in it all.

- That someday your battle with sin will be over.

- That someday death will be put to death.

- And God Himself will wipe away every tear from your

eye. And everything sad will become untrue.

And even aside from His promises, simply knowing that He stands beside you is a comfort.

- To know that, even when all people you can see forsake you, there is One you cannot see who is still there.

- That though your mother and father reject you, God is still with you and accepts you.

- That though the world stands against you, God stands beside you.

- You're not alone, Christian! It's dark, but your God hasn't gone anywhere.

- And when you cannot see, you will walk by faith.

Our God surrounds us.

- He is already in tomorrow and waits for us there even as He is with us today.

- He guides our lives. He guards our souls. All these are comforts to us when the sun goes down.

So, Christian is it dark for you right now?

- Can you not see?

- Are you afraid? Is every sound a terror?

- I beg you, look with the eye of faith and see the Pillar of Fire next to you!

- Can't you see the Living God standing beside you?

- Fix your eyes upon Jesus Christ. Refuse to look anywhere else. And know that you're safe with Him.
- He is your light in the darkness. He is with you.

7.) Last, God is Present to the End.

•The Pillar didn't depart until Israel got to the Promised Land.

- In the good times, He was there.
- When they were in trouble, He was there.
- When they obeyed, He was there.
- When they sinned, He was there.
- He didn't leave them until they got home.

Dear Christian, God's presence will lead you all the way to Heaven.

•He will not depart from you for one moment until you get there.

•And even then, He still won't leave you. But you will dwell with Him forever in glory.

Hear that Good News!

- God will not leave you. Not for one moment.
- He has sworn and will not change His mind.
- You will get home because He won't leave you in the wilderness.

You may say, "But what if I..." Nope.

- “But I’ve sinned this way.” I don’t care.
- “But I FEEL LIKE...” Have you ever had a gut feeling you were wrong about? Are your feelings always right?
- The Pillar won’t depart from you.
- HE JUST WON’T.
- You are His and He is yours. And you will make it.
- I don’t care what you think or how you feel. If you trust in Christ, God is with you to the end.
- And because He will never leave you, you will receive the fullness of the blessings Christ purchased for you.

Nothing Israel did could make God abandon them.

- And nothing you do will make Him do it, either.
- He is faithful. And He’s promised you eternal life, for Christ’s sake. So you will receive it.
- God says, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ So we can confidently say, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?’” (Hebrews 13:5b-6)

Brothers and sisters, it’s my joy to simply say WE’RE GOING TO MAKE IT.

- Our salvation isn’t left to chance. Our future is secure.
- We’re weak. But He’s strong.
- We’d give up. But He keeps us.
- We’d turn back. But He pushes us forward.

- He is faithful. And He has promised.

8.) Christian, you may feel alone, but you're not.

- You may not feel His presence, but He's guiding you.
- You may think He's left you to wander, but He's given you His Word and Spirit.
- You may feel abandoned, but He's protecting you.
- You may be in the darkest night, but He's there, too.
- And He will never leave you.
- You will make it home.

The journey may be long and full of hardship and heartache, but you'll get there. Because He has no intention of losing you.

- And He is the Almighty, faithful God.

You know, my fear-year-old hates the dark.

- If you asked her to walk down our alley at night, there's no way she'd go.
- But if I'm with her, she'll go anywhere.
- She might tell me the whole time, "This is scary. I want to go inside. Why are we out here?"
- She might jump at every noise she hears.
- She might say, "Let's hurry up. I don't like this."
- But her little feet will keep moving.
- Why? Because she knows she's safe in the presence of her father.

- Because her little hand is in mine.
- Because I'm leading her until we get where we're going.

Brothers and sisters, our Father is with us.

- So we can walk through life with confidence that we'll be safe and make it home.
- There may be "many dangers, toils, and snares."
- But since He goes with us, we can keep walking.
- His presence is our confidence.

Now, I must add one more thing before I end:

- The wonderful things said in this sermon are only for believers.
- If you don't have Christ, they're not yours. If you've not repented of your sins and trusted in Christ to save you, none of these comforts are yours.
- Rather, you have an offended and angry God to contend with. And His wrath is unfathomable.
- Hell will be your eternal home without Christ.

But God offers Christ to you this very day.

- Repent and trust in Jesus to save you from your sins.
- Be reconciled to God, adopted into His Family, and have presence with you always.
- God offers you everything in Christ. You need only to

trust in Him.

May God grant us all to trust in Christ.

•And, trusting Him, to know that God is with us
always.

•Amen.