

Christmas and God's Presence

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Have you ever sat in front of a fire and watched it slowly burn out? What was once a roaring flame which brought great warmth and enjoyment into your life, slowly began to dwindle down and eventually go out. During Old Testament times, the fire on the altar was designed to portray God's presence and fellowship with God's people based on the blood sacrifice (Exodus 29:41-43). In short, it was before the fiery altar where God's people consecrated their lives afresh to the Lord as they offered and worshipped God and found forgiveness for their sins.

Here is the practical application to our lives today. Like a fire, the warmth of God's presence should be experienced in our personal lives during the Christmas holiday and throughout the entire year. Every day with Jesus is to be sweeter than the day before! We are to meet with God, talk with Him, and enjoy His presence. We are to experience the fire of God's presence burning in our hearts and lives. We are to desire to stay close to God, enjoy the Lord's companionship, and find our spiritual fulfillment in Him (Psalm 5:1-3).

In the life of Eli, we see how important it is that we desire to experience God's presence in our daily lives. Although Eli was the high priest over Israel, he was not a faithful servant of God. When God called Samuel, we see a significant indication of Eli's failure in serving God and his lack of interest and concern about the presence of God. The Bible teaches that the lamp of God in the Holy Place of the tabernacle was "to burn always" (Exodus 27:20) which was another indication of God's presence among His people. But Eli left the fire burn out.

The lamps on the seven-branched lampstand (Exod. 25:31-37) were filled with olive oil, lit at twilight (Exod. 30:8), and kept burning "before the LORD from evening till

morning” (Exod. 27:20–21; Lev 24:2–4; 2 Chronicles 13:11; 1 Sam. 3:3). It’s significant that the people were to provide oil continuously otherwise there would be darkness in the dwelling place of God. Once again, the burning fire represented God’s presence among His people (Ex. 40:38; Deut. 5:4; Dan. 2:22), and it was an especially important part in how God revealed Himself to His children. The fiery lamp was the sure sign that God was with them and would not leave them. However, through carelessness and unconcern, Eli apparently allowed the fire to go out every night. This means that in a practical way Eli was not interested in the continual enjoyment and appreciation of God’s presence in his own heart and life.

During this time of the year, we need a new sense and appreciation of God’s presence in our lives. After all, the message of Christmas is “God with us” (Matt. 1:23). Christmas is a joyous and eventful time of the year for churches, families, and our own personal lives. But if we are not careful, it is possible for us to replace the presence of God with busyness in serving God, enjoying the festivities of the Christmas season and our friends, but not recognize the loss of enjoying God’s presence or delighting ourselves in God (Psalm 37:4).

We must remember that the things that we do in service to God and in celebration of Him during the Christmas Season must not replace the time we spend with Him in fellowship, prayer, and daily enjoyment. We should always allow the light of His presence to warm our hearts during the Christmas season and as we pass through all the changing seasons of our lives. We need to keep the fire of the presence of God burning brightly in our hearts. We must be careful that we do not allow the flame to go out and lose our fellowship, personal walk with God, and the close relationship we can have with Him on a daily basis. If necessary, rekindle the flame of God’s presence in your life once again. The promise is that God will draw near to us if we desire to draw near to Him (James 4:8).

Beloved, do not pass through this Christmas season and into the New Year without experiencing God’s presence in your life which would include such things as His fellowship, peace, stillness, power, enjoyment, satisfaction, and care over your life (1 Pet. 5:7). Don’t let the flame go out! Remember that our life, service, and fellowship with God is compared to the daily, Old Testament burnt offering, and the continual burning lamp within the tabernacle. It is a constant reminder of God’s

presence and His desire to commune with His people (Rev. 3:20). So, keep the fire burning on the altar of your own heart and do not allow the lamp of God's presence go out in your life. May each one of us experience the warmth of God's companionship in our own hearts during the Christmas season and continue to enjoy His presence through the New Year. As the Christmas carol says, "Let every heart prepare Him room!"

