

Follow the Cloud

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[0:00] Exodus 13 verse 20. And they took their journey and took off and encamped in Ethan in the edge of the wilderness. And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud to lead them away, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light to go by day and night.

He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night from before the people. The cloud, the Shekinah glory cloud, it was a sign of God's presence with the people, with the children of Israel as they journeyed in those torturous travels that they undertook through the wilderness times.

God's people, they had the cloud. They had the cloud with them through it all, through each step of the way, to guide them in the way, to give them light, to go with them constantly, day and night. This glory cloud in Exodus 16 verse 10, it says, it's the glory cloud. It was the glory of God as its essential substance was that it was the glory of God.

It wasn't just some cloud, it was the actual glory of God. And God's glory, it tells you, it filled the tabernacle. It filled the meeting place.

[1:30] Exodus 40 verses 34 to 38. God's glory filled the tabernacle where the people were fellowshiping and ministering. And the word Shekinah, the word glory, it means the dwelling place of God.

It wasn't so much the place they met, it was God's glory, was where he was and his presence. And it was both fire and cloud. You could think of fire, his revelation, his light and the cloud, his covering. And as much we can learn today from this cloud, as much as this is a fairly simple thought, it's very profound too.

That the cloud speaks to us of how the Lord wants to be ahead of us, in front of us, guiding us forward, leading us, directing us.

Not following after you, and cleaning up all the mess that you've made, at times by unwise decisions. But in front of you, going before you, ahead of you, leading you, guiding you.

[2:38] And we're going to look at some things about this cloud and what the children of Israel experienced. Number one, we see in Exodus 13, verse 21, that it says, The Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud to lead them the way, and by night in a pillar of fire.

He wanted to lead them the way. The first thought that I'd like to leave with you today is, He guides. He guides. They were instructed to follow the cloud.

To follow the cloud of God's presence, of His purposes, of His guidance. And today, brother, sister, you have the Holy Spirit. If you're a Christian today, He has given you His Spirit.

Today, we have God's Spirit to protect us. As we see in Exodus 14, verse 20, as the Israelites crossed the sea, then God moved the cloud behind them.

It was really the only occasion the cloud was behind them to protect them. It went between them and Egypt, who were pursuing them. And it was a protection. Likewise, too, God's presence is a protection for us.

[3:58] I know we heard Sunday night some amazing testimonies of the protection of God for the missionary who spoke. And likewise, the Holy Spirit wants to protect you, to keep you sheltered, and to lead you, to give you His guidance.

And will you follow His direction? It's interesting. When this cloud was about, and the children of Israel were instructed to follow the cloud for it to lead, to guide them, the children of Israel had to keep their eyes peeled, and their wits about them had to be very alert, because at any moment, that cloud could suddenly change direction.

You know, it might have settled there for a time, and then suddenly, whoop, the cloud's moving again. And everybody had to pull up their stakes and move camp again. You can imagine how the people might have at times, and, you know, they might have trudged along for a number of days, or some period of time, where they were following the cloud, the pillar, and they thought, oh, great, it stopped.

Okay, we'll set up our house, and knock all those tent pegs in, and put all the, you know, get the camel's bed sort of sorted, and put all the, and the mum of the family would have put all the things all nice and neatly in there, as certainly my lovely wife does.

Debra's got a perfect spot. You can't, you know, well, that's not quite in the right place. There you go. You know, everything has its place in the tent. And this is how the children of Israel might have been.

[5:36] And the father sort of thought, oh, I can put my easy chair out and have a bit of a snooze now. And then suddenly, you know, they just set up camp, and oh, it's off again. They had to, okay, pull everything up, pack it all back in the camel's carry sacks and whatnot, and off they were again.

This is how they had to be. The children of Israel had to be responsive to the cloud moving. And only the cloud chose to stay or move. It wasn't up to you or me. If we're in the, amongst the children of Israel, we just never knew when it was going to move again.

And it might move by day. It might move by night. And they had to keep in touch with the cloud. Keep in touch with the cloud, with God, with his presence. And it's important, brothers and sisters today, to follow the cloud, in a sense, to follow God's leading, his guiding, his presence.

To follow the Lord, to follow the leading and guiding of his indwelling Holy Spirit, of his presence.

And that's not to say we get these warm and fuzzy feelings, and we're all, oh, the goosebumps guide me as to what I should do, or, you know, whether I get those warm and fuzzy feelings about what I'm up to, or not up to.

But it's that inward witness, isn't it? As it says in Romans 8, verse 14, For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God. God will lead you.

[6:59] He'll put that inner witness within you. That sense of his peace, of his guiding. And believers today are still led by that guiding, that restraining, that residing presence of the Lord.

As we go about our day by day, he doesn't reside in a cloud floating above. Where we're meeting, above a building, but now he dwells in the innermost man, in the lives of his people, in the lives of his sons, of his daughters.

God is dwelling within, and we're led by the Spirit of God. These are the sons of God. And God's people, we need to learn that absolute guidance, that absolute dependence upon the Lord, and have that subjection to his divine guidance.

In their travels across the vast wilderness, the children of Israel, they were totally reliant upon God, each step of the way to supply, to guide, to lead them.

And the Lord was teaching them, to have their confidence, their delight in him. Do you know and love the Lord? Do you know him? Do you trust him?

[8:06] Is he yours today? Do you know him? The children of Israel are a picture, really the pilgrimage of the Christian life, of a graphic picture, our utter dependence upon God, that really, we are totally at his mercy.

We're totally reliant upon him, for our everyday, for the breath we breathe, if he should choose to take the breath away, it's his will.

The Lord giveth, the Lord taketh away, blessed be the Lord, blessed be the name of the Lord. The things we take for granted, we are utterly dependent upon him, and we mustn't forget that.

We must be as the children of Israel, and be totally reliant upon the Lord. You know, it's hard to conceive of it, isn't it, as they travelled those vast journeys, through the desert places, that God was their very supply.

In such miraculous ways, through the water out of the rock, through the mamma, miraculously coming down, feeding them day by day.

[9:18] And then the quails, the birds that God gave them to eat, the pilgrimage of the children of Israel, it pictures that utter dependence

upon him. And friends today, brother, sister, to have that dependence upon his Holy Spirit, dwelling within you, to walk in his steps, learning of him, to depend upon him, simply, day by day.

As God's people, we need to look to him, for guidance, to rely upon him. And really, as the children of Israel, spent that time, in that travelling time, they had no plans of their own.

They didn't know, what was going to happen next. You know, whether they were going to be there, for weeks, in one particular camp place, or whether they were up again, in the next hour, so who knows where.

And it could be going, who knows where, which direction. They just had to follow, God's leading, his guiding. And, they couldn't say, as it says in James, of how, some would say, oh, tomorrow I'm going to go, and do such and such.

Tomorrow we should go, to such a place. Tomorrow I'm going to do this. Or next month, I'm going such and such. Or, next year I'm, going to go here, and do this or that.

[10:33] this afternoon I'm going to go, do this. Or tonight I'm going to do that. We don't know, what the day is going to bring. What the tomorrow is going to bring. What the today is going to bring.

We need to be, likewise, utterly dependent, upon the Lord, upon the movement of the cloud. And as we're urged in James, if God wills, we're going to do this and that. You know, it's like, it's something, they used to write, DV, after, and I know sometimes we put it, in our newsletter, where we print one, which we have for some time.

But, DV, is it? Deo volens. Deo volens. God, if God wills. If God is willing. So you can say, you know, in terms of planning your future, I'm going to go and do something, on a certain day, God willing.

God willing. Because, who knows, maybe God's got a different plan. Maybe God's got a change of plans. Maybe God is going to change the date, the time, the place. We just need to be submitting to His will.

And so it should be for us, that, as we pass through, as the Israelites pass through, that uncharted desert, they didn't have a UBD, or a, what they call them, a NARF man, or whatever they called, to guide their way.

[11:50] They didn't have GPS, to know, you know, what's, which direction, north, south, east, or west, or in between. And they were passing through, a moral wilderness. There was just, it was desert, everywhere, as far as the eye could see.

And there was absolutely no way, there wasn't a path to follow, there wasn't some road signs, or, or, travel guides, to help them, along that journey. And we, likewise, we don't know how to walk, or where to go, were it not for that precious, and profound sentence, of our Saviour, who says to you, I am the way.

I am the way. The truth, and the life. No man, comes unto the Father, but by me. We need to hear His voice. We need to know, He is the way.

We need His guidance for life, and to follow Him. So, firstly, guidance. Guidance, the cloud, the presence of God, was a guiding, a guiding force, a guiding presence for them. And secondly, He gives light.

He gives light. It says there, in our text, that He, was by night, in a pillar of fire, to give them light. To give them light. And John 8 tells you, our Lord Jesus speaks to you, He says, I am the light of the world.

[13:03] He that followeth me, shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. God is light. This world is full of darkness. And you're meant to be a shining light in this world.

So look to God, to His word, as we read earlier. Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, a light unto my path. And it's His word that enlightens, that illuminates, that brings that, I saw the light.

It brings that, that enlightenment, unto us, that, that blindness, is taken away. And we see, we truly see.

Look to God, to His word, for that light, to lighten the paths of your life, for whatever it is, that lies ahead. Let it be as, it's a light, how does it go, a lamp unto my feet.

So it's in the immediate, and it's a light unto our path. It's like, it's the immediate, and it's the future too. He helps you in the present, and He helps you in the forward, sense of the future, where to go, which path to take, where your feet should tread.

[14:10] And, God's word is a light, to your past in this life. And, you can choose, to follow, a living Christ, who walks before you.

It tells us in the word, that we should walk as He walked. We have an example, that we should follow in His steps, imitating His example, having our eyes, as it says, looking unto Jesus, fixed upon Him, and of His character, that it be, transforming you, from the inside out, and reproduced, in your daily life, as you walk closer to Him, as you learn to love Him more, as you learn to trust Him. His character, is reproduced, in your day by day. And following Him, it means surrender. It means, you don't have any plans of your own. You don't have any will, any management, of your own. You're entirely His. And He is entirely yours. He is your Lord. That means, you're like, as you could picture, in the, days gone by, where the servant, was just, waiting for the bell to ring.

Well, there it goes again. You just run, when the Master calls, when He summons you, when He says, do this, do that. You don't say, oh, I don't feel like it today.

[15:28] I've got other plans. Oh, I'm a bit busy just now. Or, you know, you make some, weak, weak, weak excuse. Bro and sister, when He tells you something, there's no, argument.

There shouldn't be. Should there? We're His servants. If He is our Lord, it means, we are His servants. And we must follow the cloud, we must wait only upon Him. Our life must be placed under His power.

And with the attitude, if the Lord will, as it says in James, if the Lord will, I'm going to go and do this. If the Lord will, I'm going to do that. Are we watching the cloud? Or sometimes, does the cloud move?

And we think, oh, I better get, I'm running late. I better get my bags packed and pack up my tent and get it on the camel because I'm left behind. The cloud's already moving. And, you know, when God's presence, when God's guiding is telling us to do something, let's be alert to it and wait to it and move with God.

Are we watching the cloud? Perhaps imagine, sometimes we might imagine the cloud's going a certain way that we want it to. In just that direction that suits our own wishes and our own feelings.

[16:34] When we want to do a certain thing or make a certain move, sometimes we try to persuade ourselves that it's God's will. And maybe it's not. Brothers and sisters, we need to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit.

And, I know I've made unwise choices in my life. As I get older and greyer and hopefully wiser, I see that, and looking, you have wisdom in hindsight, don't you?

I'm sure we all can think of that. Brothers and sisters, let your will be His will. That our will is His will. That we're so in tune, we're so alert to what the cloud's doing, to where God is pointing, to where God is leading, that we're going to do what He says.

And the real secret of being guided by God is to have our will thoroughly subdued. It says of this in, I'm not sure of the reference here, but the meek will He guide in judgment and the meek will He teach His way.

And it says, I will guide thee with mine eye. Let's be sensitive to Him. And of course, the critical thing is, do you know Him?

[17:42] Are you saved? That's so vital. And I don't want to take that for granted with anyone. You know, whether you've been coming here for many weeks or months or years, that do you know Him? It's something that only you can answer.

And yeah, it's so simple to trust Him. I know, in talking to folk of late, and it's a simple thing. It's a simple thing. It's like a child crying out, Daddy. It's like a simple calling on the name of the Lord. To call His name. To turn from your own way and to say, Yes, Lord, I want Your way for my life. I want Your will. I want to follow You, to love You, to be Yours.

And it's so simple, and yet so profound. And we see in the Bible of many accounts that men and women just did their own thing. For example, Jonah, prophet of God, Jonah.

I don't know if he was prophet Jonah with certain letters after his name, or maybe the reverend doctor Jonah, or what he was. He was a prophet of God. That's how it starts off in Jonah. A man of God, a man of power for the hour.

[18:47] And Jonah, here he was, he was told to go to Nineveh, but he wanted to go to Tarshish. And the circumstances there, it seemed to favour him to do that, to go head off in the exact opposite direction.

It seemed, the circumstances seemed to favour his choice, but it was only when he was in the belly of the whale with the seaweed wrapped around his head that he came to the place to learn the bitterness of going his own way, to come to the place of recognising the foolishness of doing his own thing, of following his own will.

And he had to be taught to follow God in the depths of the ocean, in the belly of the whale. And yet, our God is so tender and gracious, isn't he, to us?

When we think of his, of his patience with us through life, as we look back at how we've not listened to him, we haven't obeyed him, we haven't been submitted to him, he will teach us his way as he guides us, as his poor, erring children, feeble as we are, he constantly watches over us, and we can look back in life and see how his hand has been there, even when we've not recognised it, that he's been coaxing us, and trying to point us to him as life has gone by.

And even as our way might be full of thorns and briars, as we walk in his ways, he will guide us in the ways of pleasantness and peace.

[20:13] He will make that way clear and bright and sure, and there can be no darkness, no uncertainty if we're following him. It says, he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness.

If we are in darkness, it is certain that we're not following him. Friends, if there's darkness in your life, it's not his will. He says, if you're following me, you shall not walk in darkness.

Recognise it. I know we all can take stock of those things that we know are not God's perfect will for us, that we need to drop things that are hanging on to us, and that means repentance.

It means that daily confession and cleansing. Perhaps at times we'll feel, I really don't know what way to turn. I don't really know what way is God's will, what steps to take.

Just seek to follow the cloud. Seek to get the light. But he wants to give from his word to your path, to your way, and to learn to wait upon him. The Israelites, the children of Israel, what an example of patience.

[21:17] Forty years. I don't know if they'd gone direct, it was only a matter of months, I understand, but it was forty years that they had to be tested and tortured in the wilderness as God was trying to get them to get right.

And we need to learn to trust him more and more. If it be forty years in the wilderness, perhaps we just need to be patient. God's teaching and training us. If we move when we ought to rest or rest when we ought to move, we shall not have his presence with us.

It says that the commandment of the Lord, they rested in the tents and at the commandment of the Lord they journeyed. They were constantly waiting upon him and his direction. And the cloud taught Israel to follow the Lord's commands.

At the Lord's command they make camp. At the Lord's command they broke camp. And this should be our same instant obedience when God speaks to you from his word, when he challenges you to drop something that's not right, when he seeks you to take up something.

To serve, to live more closely after him. And look at Israel, that picture of human nature, aren't they? If you'd been in the crowd of the children of Israel, you know, step into the time walk machine and travel back in history to be amongst them, even though God was there with this miraculous visible presence of him with them, of this cloud by day, of this pillar of fire by night.

[22:51] I mean, you couldn't get more evident than that, could you? The very evident presence of God and of his supply in miraculous ways. And yet, Exodus 16, 2, they murmured.

They murmured. They were complaining at all of these things despite all of God's blessings and miracles. And even when, as they traveled, God was giving the very Ten Commandments written with his finger upon stone in that dramatic encounter with Moses on the mount.

And while God was giving Moses the Ten Commandments, what were the children of Israel doing? They were already breaking them. And this illustrates the nature of man and of sin, doesn't it? And the Ten Commandments, we can learn much from them. I know, I don't have time to touch on this fully, but think about, think about it just briefly today.

Ian, could you come and help me for a minute? Pretend you're a lost person who thinks you're right. She's all right, mate. I'm all right, Jack.

[24:02] All right? No worries. Okay. No worries, Bobba. These are all stinky dials in here. Would you consider yourself a good person? Oh, of course. Yeah, of course. Oh, pleased to meet you.

Yeah, yeah. Okay. Now, do you think you keep the Ten Commandments? Yeah, I do. Okay. Now, what do I do? Okay.

Let me ask you about four of them. Have you ever told a lie? Yeah, I have. Okay. Yes. What does that make you and me too?

It makes me a liar. A liar. Okay. Not such a nice person anymore. Have you ever stolen anything? Yes, I have. Yeah, a paper clip, a pencil, time from work, anything.

Yeah, me too. What does that make you? I suppose it makes me a thief. A thief. Oh, he's a scoundrel now. Okay, now, next one.

[25:02] Matthew 5, it says, if anyone even looks at a woman with lust in his eye, he has already committed adultery with her in his heart. Have you ever looked at someone with lust? Straight to hell.

All right. So, you're an adulterer. Yes, I am. Yes, yes. Next one. Okay. Have you ever hated anyone or been really angry?

Yes, I have. You can't imagine that, do you? Okay. So, it says in the Bible, anyone who hates his brother is a murderer. And if you're angry with someone, you're subject to judgment.

Okay. So, by your own admission, you're a liar, a thief, an adulterer at heart, and a murderer at heart. Okay. Now, it says that it's appointed unto men once to die, and after that, the judgment.

So, if God were to judge you by his commandments, would you be guilty or innocent of breaking any of his commandments? I'd be guilty. Guilty. Where's my gavel?

[26:05] Guilty. Guilty. This man is guilty. Everyone here today, he's absolutely guilty. He's not deserving of heaven.

Okay. It's not enough to be a good person or be sorrowful for sins. You know, if you were standing in a court of law and the judge says to you, okay, Ian, you lied, you stole, you murdered, and so on, any last words before I sentence you to jail?

Hell, in other words. And they might say, judge, I'm sorry. I repent. I was a good person. I accepted you. You know, I tried to follow you. The judge would say back to them, you should have been sorry and you should have been a good person and you should have accepted me and my laws but you're still going to hell.

Because it says, worldly sorrow which without repentance results in spiritual death. And someone might say, God is a loving God and would never send anyone to hell. But should murderers and rapists and such like be set free and go unpunished?

A just judge punishes crime and likewise our God is just. He punishes sin. Only a corrupt judge will let murderers and rapists go free.

[27:27] God is that just judge. Also, God doesn't send people to hell. People send themselves to hell. So, knowing that you are guilty, Ian, and so am I and so is everyone else, according to the Bible, would you go to heaven or hell based on your guilt and what the Bible says?

I'd go to hell. Yeah. Okay. This is a good witnessing technique that people use. It's one technique of many but it's getting people to understand the bad news that we've all sinned and broken God's commandments and we all deserve hell.

It says in the Bible, the soul that sinneth shall die. It says, all have sinned. It says, the wages of sin is death. And so, but now after giving the bad news that sin means death and hell, now we can better understand the good news that Christ came to save us and to redeem us.

So, just to carry on, does that concern you that you would go to hell? Yes, absolutely. Yeah, I'm sure all of us would be concerned if we didn't have the answer. And the next thing is, Jesus did something really special for you so that we don't have to go to hell.

We did a crime, sin, and Jesus paid our fine. It's like, the Lord Jesus walked into the courtroom and said to the judge, I'm an attorney and I've sold everything and I come here to pay this \$100,000 fine and I'd like to pay the fine for Ian so that he can go free.

[28:59] He did that crime, I want to pay their fine. And that's what Christ did at the cross, isn't it? He paid our fine, He paid for our sin. And once we repent and turn to Him, He gives us the robe of righteousness.

He gives us Himself, we're clothed with Him, we become born again as we repent, as we receive Him as our Saviour, as we receive His payment for our punishment and that free gift that we receive from Him.

So, thanks Ian. Just to illustrate, that's a witnessing method and it really illustrates to us the Ten Commandments. And what did the Israelites do? They broke all of them while Moses was still on the mount.

Friends, they didn't hear God, they didn't follow Him. Friends, I urge you today to think about these things. Just to recap thus far, He guides, secondly, He gives light and thirdly, He goes with us day by day.

And that's if you know Him. You've got to make that step of realising your sin, realising your lack, realising your utter, hopeless estate without Him. Trust Him now. Trust Him.

[30:02] We don't have a visible pillar of fire by night or a cloud by day, but yet, we have His light, we have the light of His Word, we have the truth of His message.

It's still real, it's still relevant, it doesn't have to be changed, it's still the same message that we need to hear today. Friends, He goes with us day and night. If you're a Christian, He is with you.

He says, I will never leave you nor forsake you. God is always there to hear us. It says, the pillar came down when Moses prayed when he inquired of the Lord. And it talks of God's presence.

Maybe we need to pray a whole lot more. Maybe we need to be more sensitive to Him. To live in that habitual dependence upon Him like the Israelites had to. Instead of going about life in our own merry way, doing our own thing without any thought for what God would want, that we would listen to Him who says to you, I am the way, the truth, and the life.

Take a step today on that journey. Take a step to follow Him. Let Him turn your life around and let Him show you the way.

[31:09] Let Him turn your life around.