

The promise of His presence

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- [0 : 0 0] Let me invite you to take your Bibles and to open them again at Matthew chapter 28. We're going to be thinking of the last few words of this chapter.
- Think in other words at the end of verse 20. I'll reread from verse 18. Jesus said to his disciples, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.
- Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you.
- And behold, I am with you always to the end of the age. It's especially these last words. I am with you always to the end of the age.
- I wonder if you might be able to picture the scene. You're either in the swimming pool or you're watching those in the swimming pool. And you see this young child. And this young child is near the edge of the swimming pool.
- [1 : 0 6] And the child is inching closer to the edge. And you see that the child wants to actually jump in. And the child moves closer. And then all of a sudden it moves back. Because that whole fear as to what might be there when they jump in, it's there and the child moves closer to the edge and then back.
- And then closer to the edge and then back. And you look at a young child like that and you almost see the little battle that's raging. The battle between desire of wanting to jump in, but fear also that's present as to what might happen when they do jump in.
- Now in that same image, I want you to notice the difference as to what will be there if this young child knows that a family member is there in the swimming pool ready to catch them.
- And the difference is that this young child knows that when he or she jumps, somebody's there with outstretched arms to help them land to splash, to learn one of the good things about life, where it is to jump into water.
- The whole battle between desire and fear was settled by the reassuring presence of somebody who was with them. Well, when we come to a passage like this, we realize that the same principle applies.
- [2 : 2 0] Because this gospel record that Matthew has given to us of the birth, the life, the impact, the death, the resurrection of Jesus, as it concludes with this final command that Jesus has given to his church to go and to make disciples, or rather, as we go, we make disciples, there is this command that's been given.
- Now this whole process of as we go, we make disciples, for some of us it means that as we engage at home, as we engage in our places of work, as we engage in our community, we make disciples.
- For others, the application of this as we go is as they go to different parts of the world, to different people groups, to, in some cases, people far, far away from the areas that they've grown up and that they've known.

But every one of God's people has this command by Jesus Christ that as we go, we make disciples. People who know Jesus and who love Jesus and who want to follow Jesus and who want to learn of Jesus to become like Jesus.

As we go, we make disciples. But here's the thing. There'd be very few Jesus-following, Bible-believing Christians who don't want to obey that command.

[3 : 36] We do. But if we're honest, there's a degree of fear about the consequences of obeying that command. We live in a culture that tells us if you must have faith, and the emphasis is on if, if you must have faith, then faith should be very much a private thing.

You shouldn't be going about telling people about your faith. You shouldn't be going about trying to convert people to your faith. You shouldn't be going about proselytizing, as they say. Well, the message of Jesus is very different.

Because Jesus wants us to tell people of our faith. Because in doing so, we're not telling of a church or a denomination or a people as such. We're telling of a person.

We're telling about him. So with that battle of desire to obey this command, where we know that there's a degree of the fear of the consequences of obeying this command, we have the reassurance in these final words of verse 20, that somebody will be with us every step of the way as we seek to make him known in this culture.

And so that's what we're going to be focusing on today. What does Jesus mean when he says to us, Behold, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

[5 : 00] I want us to see two things this afternoon. I want to see, first of all, what this promise actually means. And then we're going to think about how this promise is something that is an enduring promise that we can lay hold of today.

Now, I don't know whether or not you're a January person and are just delighted that all the festivities of December are over and done with, that life is back to normal. Or you may be one of these December people who just love the festivities, love the anticipation, love all the food and the sounds and the smells and all these things that go along with Christmas.

You may be a December person, you may be a January person, but irrespective of that, for those of us in the family of faith, whenever we do think of the arrival of Jesus Christ into this world, one of the things that should spring to mind is how God keeps his promises.

And so for Jesus following Bible-believing Christians, when we hear of anything to do with Christmas or the incarnation, we're thinking this is God keeping his promises.

Because his promise was right at the beginning of history that one would come who would undo the curse of sin. One would come who would destroy the power of sin, destroy Satan.

[6 : 17] Throughout the Bible, we're given great amount of detail as to what the arrival would be like, that this one who would come would not be parachuted in from heaven with great fanfare, but rather would be born in the most normal but unlikely fashion, be born of a virgin, be born in Bethlehem, would be a refugee in Egypt, would be brought up in the place nobody wants to be from, that place of Nazareth.

We have the promises that this individual is going to transform, that he is going to bring light out of darkness. He's going to bring life out of death. The blind are going to see, the lame are going to walk, the deaf are going to hear.

And amid all of the great promises, coinciding with the promise of a Messiah, there's this one promise. The promise is given in Isaiah, and it says that this promised one is going to be given a very special name, going to be called Emmanuel, which means God with us.

And so we fast forward to the beginning of Matthew's Gospel, and that very same promise, written 107, 800 years before Matthew's Gospel was written, it was quoted at the start of Matthew's Gospel, in the context of the birth of Jesus Christ, that he is the Emmanuel.

He is God with us. Later on in this Gospel, we're told in chapter 18, Jesus himself, from his own lips, says, where two or three of you gather together in my name, I will be there.

[7 : 54] I will be with you. And here we have, at the end of this Gospel record of the life of Jesus, we have the promise of Jesus continuing to be with us. So he is the great Emmanuel, God with us.

We have in chapter 18, the promise that when we come together, when we gather together as the people of God, he's with us. In chapter 28, we're told that as we scatter, and as we go with the message of truth, the message of hope, the message of life, he's also with us.

This promise of the abiding presence of our Saviour, is a promise that we can hold on to today. Because it is the emphatic I am who has given us this promise.

And it's a promise that is not time limited. The word that we have here, translated in our English as always, literally means the whole of every day.

So it's not simply that the promise of the presence of our Saviour is something on the horizon, that at some point, when our Lord either calls us from this earth, or our Lord returns in glory, that then we're going to know what it is to be with him.

[9 : 10] This tells us the whole of every day. And Jesus has promised to be with his people. And we know through the teaching of the Bible, that is through the power and presence of his Spirit.

And so where, some 40 days beforehand, when Jesus was saying to his people on that night before he was betrayed, he said, I will not leave you as orphans.

I will come to you. In a short while, you're going to be mourning, but then the mourning will be replaced with joy, because I'm coming to you.

I will be with you in a way, completely unlike how I've been with you up until now, I will be with you always, through the generations, always.

And so, as these disciples are given, in many ways, the task that was as hard as the task Moses was given, to go back to Pharaoh and demand that God's people would be released, so as the church is given this command, to go out and to make disciples, of all nations, a task that seems impossible, a task that seems to have consequences attached to it, it is a task that's given to us, with the promise of the abiding presence, of Jesus Christ, with his people.

[10 : 34] So how does this apply to us today? Well, it applies to us in the sense that there are probably few other more encouraging promises, from the word of God, that we can hold on to.

Because this is telling us, that he is always with us, wherever we are in the world. He is always with us, on a daily basis, that we might experience his pardon and his forgiveness, that we might experience his sanctifying and his strengthening, we might experience his defending of us, his keeping of us, we might experience his leading, his guiding, that we might experience his presence with us in times of sorrow, and in times of joy, in times of sickness, in times of health, from the morning, to the afternoon, to the evening, to the night, the promise of the presence of God, is with his people.

The promise is, for the presence of God, no matter what is happening in our existence, that he will be with us. Let me illustrate this. In the last letter, that the Apostle Paul, who was probably one of the most effective Christian witnesses, that history has ever seen, one of the effective witnesses, pointed people to Jesus, as the hope, that men, women, boys and girls need.

He writes in his last letter, in chapter 4, that at his first defense, nobody stood with him. The implication is, he expected certain people, to be on his side, and to stand with him, and to be there, giving some sort of support.

But at his first defense, nobody stood with me. Abandoned. What does the Bible say? Yet the Lord was with me.

[12 : 35] Why? Because the promise, of the presence, of our Savior, to be with his people, is a promise that lasts. And so Paul, beforehand, when he was thinking about, what glory might be like, he talks about it, in the sense of, being with the Lord.

So he speaks of his present existence, as the Lord being with him. He speaks of his future existence, as the Lord being with him. And even, we could throw in, as it were, an Old Testament illustration, that would point this as well.

Even as David thinks of his present, as opposed to his future, and he thinks, that through the valley, of the shadow of death, through the darkest valley, he's not going to be afraid.

Why? Because he's not alone. Because the Lord, who is his shepherd, will be with him. And so we have the promise, of the presence, of our Savior, with us.

Now, some people may say, and quite rightly say, yes, I get that. And it is a comfort. But there's an element to this, that I just don't understand.

[13 : 42] Because you say to me, and Jesus says, he's going to be with us. But, but is Jesus not in heaven just now? So, if Jesus is in heaven, just now, because he's ascended, he's at the right hand of God, how can he still, be with me?

How can I, benefit, from the promise, of his, his nearness, and his support, and his, his direction, and his care? How can I, experience that today?

And of course, somebody, thinking along these lines, is correct, in some of these assumptions. But there is a, there's a dual aspect, to the truth, of the presence, of our Savior.

We remember that Jesus Christ, was fully God, and fully man. Fully God, means, that he, has that, knowledge, that God has.

He has that, presence, that God has. What does the Bible teach us, about the presence of God? The Bible teaches us, that it doesn't matter, where we are.

[14 : 45] It doesn't matter, whether we're on this side of the world, or on the far side of the world. It doesn't matter, whether we're in light, or whether we're in darkness. That we can never escape God. Because God, in that sense, sees us everywhere.

Jesus, is fully God. As, fully God, he is therefore, present, wherever we are. that we cannot escape, his presence.

As fully man, he has ascended, bodily, into, that place, in heaven above, where the glory of God, radiates, every, element of that existence.

And where the will of God, is done perfectly. The bodily, physical presence, of our Savior is there. But, that does not mean, that we do not benefit, from his presence, as being fully God, here on earth.

Because they're connected. The, the, the physical, dust of the earth, is on the throne of glory. In that, Jesus has been raised, from the dead, bodily, and he has ascended, into glory bodily.

[15 : 53] He has taken his position, in that, that place of exaltation. And there, having atoned for sin, once and for all, he has, he has sat down. In that, regal position, we also have, a different picture, in that sense of, that priestly position.

That he is there, interceding on our behalf. That his very presence there, with the very wounds, that have been accrued, on the cross of Calvary. That his very presence there, is, is acting on our behalf, as we live, and exist, in this earth.

The very presence, physically, of our Savior in heaven. The very promise, of his presence, as fully God, here on earth, that it impacts, how we live today.

Because he has promised, that not simply, with his Father, but he would come, and take up residence, within us, by the power, by the presence, of his own, Holy Spirit.

So you and I, if we are, among the people of God today, we are indwelt, by God. And so we have the promise, of God. That no matter, where we are, no matter, what we're doing, no matter, how pleasant life is, no matter, how unpleasant life is, God, is with, his people.

[17 : 15] And so somebody, put it in this way, that we have, at the finishing line, as it were, we have, our Savior, they are waiting for us.

But more than that, as we're on this race, of faith, he is there, alongside us, filling us with hope, reminding us, Philippians 1, verse 6, where God begins the work, he's finished the work, I'm going to see you, through this, Jesus says, alongside us.

He's the one, who's giving us courage, on that path of faith, reminding us, that we need not fear, because he's there. Colossians 1, verse 29, tells us, that on that path, of faith, he's given us, the energy that we need, to be able to continue.

And so, on that path of faith, beside us, before us, in front of us, we have the very presence, of our Savior, who is with us. And that makes all the difference, in life.

Because you know, for most of us in life, do we not just, do we not just go through life, almost at mid altitude? You know, it's where we exist, normally, isn't it? It's where the routines, of life is, and that has to be routine.

[18 : 26] If there's, if life is a constant state, of flux and chaos, then it's almost, it'd be impossible, for us to exist. But for most of us, we, and for most of us, most of the time, we are just going along, at mid altitude.

We've got our duties, and responsibilities at home, whether it's our spouses, or parents, or children. We've got our responsibilities, in our work environment. We've got our responsibilities, in the community, perhaps in the congregation, and we exist largely, at mid altitude.

Occasionally, of course, we, we summit some peaks, don't we? And there's these moments, in life, that are, that are very precious. And it might be, a wedding day, or it might be, might be a promotion at work, or it might be the birth, of a child, or something.

And there's these, there's these peaks, in life, that occasionally, in God's good providence, we get to summit. For the most part, we're mid altitude, aren't we? But then, every so often, just, our world, bottoms out, doesn't it?

And we end up, plummeting. And we end up, in circumstances, that we would never, choose to end up in. And it's as if, the bottom of our world, has dropped out.

[19 : 37] And it might be, that, a diagnosis, is confirmed. Or it could be, that we have, the intruder, of death. Or it could be, that the redundancy, is coming, or something like that, but every so often, that, just, we're going along, and then our world, bottoms out, and we're in darkness.

And when we're in that darkness, what do we need to hear? We need to hear the promise, that even though things, may be dark all around us, we have the light, of God's promise, of his presence.

Because even in the darkness, he's there with us. I have no concept, as to what's going on, in your life, in the same way, you have no concept, as to what's going on, in my life today.

And it's possible, that the majority, are just, we're at mid altitude. It's possible, that one or two, are, you've summited a peak, in recent days. But it's highly likely, that one or two of us, have had the bottom, of our worlds fall out.

What do we need to know? We need to know, that I am with you, always. And there will never, come a point in time, where that, that verse, will somehow, run out.

[20 : 46] Today, if it is darkness, remember, that he's there. Today, if you're, summiting a peak, remember, he's there too.

And today, if you're, at mid altitude, remember, that he's with us. That, is the promise, that he has given. So, if that's a promise, just for a couple of minutes, let me think about, the reality of that promise, and the fact that, it endures.

Because the promise is, behold, I am with you, always, the whole of every day. And this is going to be, to the end, of, the age.

We know that, in this life, good things in this life, don't tend to, to last, do they? As much as we would love them to last, and I'm not a particularly morose person, so I'm not coming to, you know, with a particularly negative outlook, it's just reality, isn't it?

Good things, don't tend to last, in this world. That, our, our health, at some point, our health is going to break. We can have good health, for many, many years, but at some point, our health will break.

[21 : 54] At some point, even, the best of relationships, are going to be interrupted, even by death. And, and where there is, the, the, the greater the love, the, the, the greater the sense of loss, that, that love no longer being there.

The good weather, that we may enjoy, we know, especially coming from this island, we know that doesn't last. But even good things, that we may achieve, even when you've painted, spent three Saturdays, the entire day, painting the fence, you know the fence, is not going to look great, after one winter.

We know good things, in this life, because this is a broken world, good things don't last. We wish they would, but they don't. There is, however, one exception, and this is it.

This is a good thing, in this world, that will last. Because this is, a promise, that the brokenness, of this existence, cannot impact.

Because this is a promise, from the victorious, all reigning, full authority, Son of God, the Messiah. And he says, where everything else, good in this world, will come to a conclusion, this promise, will not.

[23 : 05] This is a promise, that will continue, to the very end. Just as, the command, that as we go, we make disciples. Just as that command, will never reach, a point in history, where it's somehow, been fulfilled, and it's been achieved, and world evangelism, is now complete, and every nation, of the world, is saturated, by Jesus following, Bible believing people.

That's not going to happen. And just in the same way, as this command, will not at some point, reach a position, of being outmoded, or needing to be, refreshed, for a modern audience.

Or, in the views of some of the, influential people, in our society today, this should be, among these things, that we need to put to one side. You know, obviously in the past, people thought, this great commission, was significant.

But now, we've got a better understanding. We just need to respect, the other religions, of the world. And we need to respect, the other outlooks, of the world. And we don't need to, to engage in that level, of rubbish.

Just in the same way, this commission, of Jesus, this command, of Jesus, is to be maintained, throughout history. So this promise of Jesus, is going to continue, throughout history.

- [24 : 22] But what I want us to note, is that included, within this promise, is the note, that there will be, an end, of the age. It wasn't simply, a turn of phrase, that Jesus was using, behold I'm with you always, to the end of the age.

It's not that, that is just something, that was part of, the language of the day. This is actually a promise. Because this is a promise, from the one, who has all authority, and he's saying, there is a moment coming, where there will not be, a moment, any further.

There is a time coming, where time, is going to stop. It's as if, if you think of, almost the image, of the throne room of heaven, if there were such a thing, as a, as a, as a wall calendar, that there is a date, that is, that is circled.

In fact, there's a date, that's highlighted as well. And it stands out, unlike all the other days, that had preceded it. Because on that date, set firmly, in the mind of, our heavenly father.

On that date, something spectacular, is going to take place. Something spectacular, is going to take place, and all those, who have fallen asleep in Christ, are going to wake up. And they're going to wake up, to what?

- [25 : 44] They're going to wake up, to a family reunion, the like of which, we can barely comprehend, where the head of the family, is going to be, returning in power. There's going to be music, that's going to accompany, this arrival of the saviour.

There's going to be, this welcome party, of all those, who have fallen asleep in Jesus. They will be woken, to this family reunion, where the head of the family, is present. And they will escort, be there with the head, of the family, as he comes, to gather all those, of his people, who are alive, on that day.

And who will be, realizing, when they hear that sound, and when they see that sight, that the end, has now come. I don't know, if you think much, about the end.

I was preaching about it, in a different context, a number of days ago. But I was thinking about it, and in some ways, there's going to be, two facial expressions, that's going to be, evidenced on that day.

So you're going to have, the people of God, who are alive that day, and who are going to hear, this trumpet sound, and are going to see, this sight. And when the initial shock, of what takes, of this sound, and this sight, when the initial shock, begins to get processed, what's going to happen?

- [26 : 57] There's going to be, a growing, beaming smile, on the people of God. Because, the promise, that has been given, by Almighty God, has come true.

The Saviour, has come back. For others, when the shock, of that noise, and that sight, begins to dawn on them, it's almost, as if you're going to see, the colour draining, from their faces.

Because, they too, will realise, just, what God has promised, has come true. And for them, perhaps for you, if that's going to describe you, at that moment, it will be too late.

At that moment, your opportunity, to turn, and to trust in Jesus, as your only hope, it will have passed. an opportunity, an opportunity, will have gone.

Because, Jesus tells us, that the age, that we live in, is coming, to an end. And that means, that there is, an ever, shortening opportunity, for you.

- [28 : 13] If you are still, in that position, of having rejected Jesus. an ever, shortening opportunity, for you, to repent, and to believe, to turn, and to trust, in him.

And so, the end of the age, is 2,000 years closer, than when Jesus, spoke of it here. And might we be the generation, that are alive, when our Lord comes?

We don't know. But one thing we do know, is that we best be ready. What facial expression, is going to be on your face? Because when the end of the age comes, then, it's going to usher in, for the people of God, something remarkable, isn't it?

Because having had the promise, of the presence of God, as we gather, in Matthew chapter 18, and as we go, with the, to make disciples, the promise of the presence of God, well, we're going to experience, the presence of God, in an entirely, closer way.

You know, we've often spoken, of people, when, who have a living faith, that they pass, into the nearer presence, of their saviour. Well, on that day, we will pass, into the nearer presence, of our saviour.

[29 : 24] We will pass, into that place, where the dwelling of God, will now be, with man. I don't know, whether C.S. Lewis, who was the author, of these, of the books, of Chronicles of Narnia, I don't know, was he thinking, about the words, that Paul writes, to the church in Corinth, where he quotes, no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind is conceived, what God has prepared, for his people.

I don't know, was that in his mind, when he, he wrote some of these words, in the last of the book, of the Chronicles of Narnia. Let me just finish, with these last words. It's from, the book entitled, The Last Battle, and of course, the Chronicles of Narnia, it's speaking about, the great, the great lion, that has conquered, this picture, this biblical image, of Jesus.

And in the last battle, it says this, and as he spoke, that is the lion, he no longer, looked to them like a lion, but the things, that began to happen, after that, were so great, and so beautiful, I can't write about them.

And for us, this is the end, of all the stories, and we can truly say, that they all lived, happily ever after. And this is the thing, I want you to remember, but for them, as they were in the nearer, presence, of their saviour, but for them, it was only the beginning, of the real story.

Because all their life, in this world, and all their adventures, in Narnia, had only been the cover, and the title page. Now at last, they were beginning, chapter one, of the great story, which no one, on earth has read, which goes on, forever, in which every chapter, is better, than the one before.

[30 : 58] You see, life here is, in many ways, the pre-match warm-up. Will you be ready, and fit, for heaven above, it's only, by looking, trusting, loving, and serving.

The one, who has, willingly, gone to the cross, to pay, for every one, of your sins, so that you don't need, to be defined, by them. You can be, forgiven, from them.

He invites you, to come, and to follow him, and to know, that through mid-altitude, through the peaks, through the darkness, that he is with you, always.

Amen. May God bless, these few thoughts, to us. Thank you. Thank you.