

The Presence of God

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Date: 06 December 2020

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[0 : 0 0] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

Genesis chapter 28, we're going to continue our series on Advent called the long story of the coming of Jesus.

So I'm excited for us to dive into God's Word. So Genesis chapter 28, Genesis chapter 28, I'm going to begin reading in verse 10.

It's the Word of God. It says, Jacob left Beersheba and went toward Haran. And he came to a certain place and stayed there that night because the sun had set.

Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and laid down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed.

[1 : 0 7] And behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.

And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, I am the Lord, the God of Abraham, your father, and the God of Isaac.

The land on which you lie, I will give to you and to your offspring. Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south.

And in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed. Verse 15.

This is chapter 28, verse 15. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go and will bring you back to this land.

[2 : 1 3] For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised to you. Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, surely God, the Lord is in this place.

And I did not know it. And he was afraid and said, how awesome is this place there? This is none other than the house of God.

And this is the gate of heaven. Verse 18. So early in the morning, Jacob took the stone that he'd put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on top of it.

He called the name of the place Bethel. But the name of the city was Luz at the first. Then Jacob made a vow saying, if God will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God.

And this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house. And of all that you give me, I will give a full tenth to you.

[3 : 3 2] It's the authoritative, inerrant, infallible word of God. It just makes you want to just read tons of it this morning.

It's such a wonderful, I just love these passages. Well, by way of introduction, in August of 1966, Simon and Garfunkel, famous for their hit singles, The Sound of Silence, Bridge Over Troubled Water, Cecilia, you name it, released an unusual single.

They released their version, a version of Silent Night. But while they sang the simple angelic refrains of the old carol and two-part harmony, which is signature for Simon and Garfunkel, two guys, two-part, they also played clips from the seven o'clock news.

The carol sung, like you know Silent Night, it sings of everything being quiet and calm and bright. But the news stories captured the unrest and uncertainty encompassing America that summer.

Drug overdose of a famous comedian. Brutal murder of nine innocent nurses in training. Martin Luther King leading protests for racial justice with threats of the military being brought in.

[4 : 58] Activists interrupting Congress to voice their opposition to the war in Vietnam. President Nixon announcing that unless there's a significant increase of troops, America should look forward to five more years of war.

The effect is dramatic. The effect even is magnified if you put on headphones and you listen to this song. The carol comes in on your left ear and the news gets louder and louder and louder in your right ear.

The song seems to be saying that the carols may sing of peace and calm and quiet, but life in the real world is harsh and hard.

It almost seems to be saying that the carol is the same. The carol is the same. What's the meaning of this joy and peace the songs announced if our lives are mired in so much brokenness?

And if we're honest, as we look to Christmas this year, we feel this tension, don't we? I mean, 2020 has not let up. Pandemic lockdowns, job loss, social unrest, riots, a divided presidential election, and an ongoing bitter dispute about who won.

[6 : 18] Maybe by January 20th we'll figure that out. The division is played out every day on the newsreels and on social media, but behind the scenes there's a palpable despair in the darkness.

Canceled games disappoint. Canceled gatherings discourage. Uncertainty looms. Loneliness gnaws. Fear grows and things get worse when we're alone. Loneliness is up.

Depression is up. Drug abuse and alcohol abuse are up. Suicides are up. Can we really sing about a silent night? Or about the wonders of His love?

Well, I think if we get low this morning, we're going to see more clearly that Christmas is not just for us when things are going well.

Christmas is for us when we don't see a way out. Christmas is for us when we're afraid. Thankfully, Christmas says something so much better than cheer up and put on your best church face.

[7 : 22] Christmas says do not fear. God is with you. This morning, we're going to continue this series, The Long Story of the Coming of Jesus. We're going to look at this stunning encounter between Jacob and the Lord, and we're going to try to trace it out throughout the Old Testament.

Hopefully I won't bore you, but it's exciting to me. But it's God's Word. Even my excitement is not the most important thing. I think it's actually completely staggering. It's tremendously stabilizing, and it gloriously satisfies all that we need to know this Christmas.

So in a word, where we're going is do not fear. Jesus will be with you wherever you go. Do not fear. Jesus will be with you wherever you go. That's our main point, if you will.

The first point we're going to use to break that out is the promise. The promise. I mean, these verses tell about this encounter between the living God and Jacob at Bethel.

And, you know, all throughout the Old Testament, you see these encounters. They're called revelations of God. These moments where God seemed to lift the veil and interact with human beings in a way that is staggering because it shouldn't happen, because we're sinners.

[8 : 32] We deserve immediate wrath. And so he introduces himself to Jacob in this passage. And, you know, if you remember last week, we traced out the story of the Old Testament, well, here we're dropping into one scene first.

That's what we're doing. And Jacob is the son of Isaac. You know that he's the grandson of Father Abraham, which would be pretty cool to have in the family tree, wouldn't it? I guess it is in our family tree because we've been grafted in.

So it is cool. Father Abraham. Well, Jacob is well known for his unruliness. You guys know that very well. And it begins before he's born. He wrestles with his brother Esau in the womb.

Then he exits the womb, holding his brother's heel. Kind of like, I'm going to take you out. That's the last thing I can do with my life. You know, Esau is the firstborn and the rightful heir of the father's blessing.

But from birth, Jacob shows that he's willing to do whatever it takes to get that blessing that he desperately wants from his brother. And with his mom's help, if you remember the whole kind of putting on the sheep's clothes and things like that and cooking the, not the porridge, but the soup for his dad, Jacob deceives his father, cheats his brother out of the blessing as his father Isaac is dying.

[9 : 40] And when Esau finds out, he says, I'm going to get him. It's the last thing I do. So Jacob's on the run. So that's how we encounter Jacob right here in chapter 28.

He's on the run. He's on a long journey. He's desperate for help. The text makes this very clear. So this is Genesis 28, verse 10. Look down there with me, or actually 11.

Yeah, he left for Sheba, but then he came to a certain place, stayed there at night because the sun had set, taking one of the stones of the place. He put it under his head and lay down in that place to rest. You know, you're meant to capture the grimness of the situation.

It's night now. When you're sojourning through the wilderness, night is not a good time. You know, there's not the light of your phone close by.

Jacob no longer has the security of the sun. That's what you're meant to see. Danger is lurking in the darkness. He is in the wilderness. Now Jacob no longer has the comfort of his father and mother's tents and only a rock for a pillow.

[10 : 46] Jacob is all alone. That's what you're meant to take right here. Jacob completely alone. And really, we're meant, the readers are meant to wonder, what will Jacob do? He has lied and cheated and stolen from everyone in his life.

What are you going to do when no one's around? Where will he turn now? The Lord has been his family's God, but will he become Jacob's God?

That's the tension in the passage. Will Jacob serve the Lord or will he be a scoundrel his whole life? And so Jacob lays his head down on the stone, falls asleep, and he dreams a dream.

The Lord comes to him and a dream. Now, this is so fascinating to me. The journey to Rebecca's brother Laban, who was a scoundrel too, but it was 550 miles, and yet the author of Genesis, which is Moses, only gives us one little scene of that journey.

So 550 miles with no plane, no car. I mean, 550 miles, and we get this one scene so that we can, I think, so that we can see something incredible about the living God and Jacob.

[12 : 00] Now, wonderfully, while the early years of Jacob's life chronicle his willingness to do whatever it takes to get the blessing, this story is not about what Jacob does. It's not about him striving to get blessing from God.

It's about God coming down to bless him. The Lord appears in a dream, not so that we would question whether it's true, like we often question our dreams and try to interpret them.

The Lord appears to him in a dream to underline the reality that it is the Lord who comes for Jacob. Jacob, one author says, it is not Jacob who turns to God, but God who turns to Jacob.

Now, there's three elements to this dream. The vision, which you remember, which you guys know, he dreamed, behold, a ladder, Jacob's ladder, so to speak.

Not really Jacob's ladder, but top went all the way to heaven. Behold, angels of God ascending and descending. You know, it's a vision. Behold is what it says.

[13 : 01] We're meant to focus on what Jacob saw. What a passage is pointing at. Now, all the commentators agree that we shouldn't think of a ladder.

You know, we think of a ladder you prop up against the side of the house and only one person go up, one person go down. You better have someone hold the bottom or something like that. That's not really the vision here. It's really a staircase, like a temple that would be common in those days, common to Jacob's family.

The staircase would have been wide and led up to a mound where the altar to a God was on top. And that's kind of the idea, this grand, built more like staircase that they walk up to to meet with the Lord.

And so the vision Jacob would have is this place where people go, you know, people that are religious people, they go and they ascend this staircase, walking up to serve the Lord. But that's not what he sees.

He sees angels ascending and descending, not humans up this staircase. So there's the vision. Second, we see a promise. If you look in verse 13 and 14, you know, he gets, I'm Lord, the God of your father Abraham, the God of Isaac.

[14 : 09] And then he has the promise. This is just a repetition of the promise to Abraham. If you remember several weeks or last week, Genesis 12. So he promises him land, the land on which you lie.

He promises him offspring, like the dust of the earth. He promises him blessing. End of verse 14. And you, all the families of the earth will be blessed. So we have the vision, we have the land, but we also have a new promise.

Look in verse 15. He says, Behold, I am with you and I will keep you wherever you go and will bring you back to this land, for I will not leave you until I've done what I promised to do for you. Now he, the Lord told Isaac, Jacob's father, that he would be with him in 26, 24.

But here the Lord gets very specific. I'll be with you. I'll sustain you. I'll watch over and protect you. Whatever lies ahead. Whatever happens.

I'll be with you. I'll bring you back. What's going on here? The Lord's saying, I am the God of Abraham. I am the God of Isaac. But I will be your God, Jacob. Now, if you're going to find your way in this world, you must find the living God to be your God.

[15 : 25] You won't get to heaven on your parents' faith, grandparents' faith. And that's what's happening in this passage.

Now, if you would bear with me for a moment. If we step back and consider our whole Bibles, we say, what do we make of this revelation? Now, many people rightly say this revelation foreshadows to God's commitment to meet with people in particular places.

Now, if you notice when we read through the passage, place is emphasized several times. Because Bethel is an important place, it goes on to become an important place for the kingdoms to worship. It was where one of the temples was.

And so it's a particular place. And so that's kind of the idea, is that God meets with Jacob there to underline God's commitment to meet with particular people in particular places. So he does that through altars and temples.

Living God descends the staircase, so to speak, and dwells with his people. That's what happens in particular places. These sacred places all throughout the Old Testament. And so God speaks with them and dwells with them.

[16 : 30] And this becomes even clearer when Jesus says, the angels of God ascend and descend on me in John 1. He's saying, I am the true temple. I'm the true sacred space. I am the only way to God.

I am the way, the truth, and the life. He's the particular place now where we encounter God forever. So that's one thing going on, this idea of a static particular place where God encounters his people.

Told you to bear with me. But if we step back again, this revelation also announces God's promise to not just be with his people in one place, but to be with them wherever they go.

This, it seems, is the emphasis in my mind in the passage. Now, for several reasons. The first is, it says the Lord is beside him.

Now look in verse 13. If you have an ESV, they have a little footnote here. And I promise I don't do this a lot. But not that I, yeah, yeah. But the Lord stood above him.

[17 : 35] But if you see that little footnote there, if you go down to the bottom, it says, or beside him. So the Lord stood above it, above the ladder, or beside him, that is Jacob.

Now, I think the right interpretation is beside him, Jacob. I think that's the emphasis of the context.

It aligns with verse 15 when he says, I will be with you. This idea, not like, I'm not promising to be with you while I'm on top of the ladder up in heaven looking down on you.

You get the point? I think he's saying, I'm beside you, therefore I will tell you right now. I promise just like I'm with you right now, I'll be with you forever. I think that's an important point. Verse 16, surely the Lord is in this place.

Surely the Lord is in this place. I think the emphasis is not that God is up there and Jacob must ascend up there in order to interact with the Lord. But the emphasis is that God has come down here to be with Jacob where he is.

[18 : 42] Richard Baucom helps us here in a very helpful quote. He says, what Jacob has discovered is not so much that God is in that particular place as that God is where he is.

Jacob's revelation, God's revelation to Jacob is not for a man who is going to settle down at Bethel with a temple close at hand in which to worship God. Rather, it is for a man on a journey.

From now on, every place where Jacob sleeps is a Bethel. Now that's incredible. And the revelation is profound because in it, the living God promises to Jacob to be his God while he's on the run.

And while he does not know what lies ahead, he promises to be with him wherever he goes. Now, we're going to test this theory a little bit. But so point two is the pattern, the pattern.

So is this true? Is this the promise of Jacob? Is this what the uniqueness of the promise of Jacob is? And I think the pattern sets it up. The presence of God accompanies Jacob throughout the rest of his life.

[19 : 56] One author said, the presence of God is the theme of Jacob's life. I want that to be the theme of my life. And so after Jacob was with Laban for 14 years, remember they had to work for one wife or seven and then got the wrong wife and then worked for seven more to get the other one, the one he wanted.

And the first time, the Lord comes to him and says, return to your home. But look what he said. Verse 31, three, we have it for you. Then the Lord said to Jacob, return to the land of your fathers and to your kindred and I will be with you.

He's underlining that promise again. Now, Jacob, if you remember the story, this is just wonderful story. If you haven't read the book of Genesis, he journeys home again. He's afraid again. He's afraid of meeting Esau.

Remember the guy that said he was going to hunt him down. It's the last thing he could do with his life. When he meets Esau, Esau runs to him like the prodigal father and runs to him and hugs him and falls on his neck and kisses him.

Jacob then continues home. When he comes to Bethel again, that same place he offers a sacrifice. But look what he says in verse 35, three, he says, let us arise and go to Bethel.

[21 : 04] Talking to his family so that I may make it there an altar to the Lord, to the God, who answers me in the day of my distress and has been with me wherever I have gone.

Now that language, you should remember that from 28. That language should hop out with you. You know, hop out to you. Jacob back in Bethel and it is a wonderful place. He offers a sacrifice there.

Not primarily because the place is sacred, but because God has kept his promises. God has been with him. God has blessed him and God has brought him back.

Remember he says, I came back. I went back alone. I came back with two houses. I came back with so much blessing. And at the end of his life, you remember that story? At the end of his life, there's a whole selling his son or his son sold one of his sons into slavery in Egypt.

He rose up through the ranks, ends up providing the whole world with food. And as Jacob travels down there, remember he did not want to go. He didn't want to leave the land where God was. The Lord tells him, I'll be with you again.

[22 : 05] Look in verse 46, 3 and 4. He says, I am God, the God of your father. Don't be afraid to go down to Egypt. I myself will go down with you to Egypt. And I will also bring you up again.

And Joseph's hand shall close your eyes. He's so specific and wonderful. So I'll go down with you and I'll bring you up again.

The presence of God accompanies the people of Israel after Jacob dies into the wilderness. You remember when they were in Egypt, the people of God were in Egypt 400 years and the Lord blessed them.

Pharaoh didn't know what was going on because they were blessing and they were fruitful and strong and increasing in number. After the Passover, they took off running. If you remember that, the Lord promised to be with them.

I was talking to my kids about this this week. You know, he promised to be with them with that pillar of cloud by day and by night, a pillar of fire. Exodus 13 says, the Lord went before them by day and a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way and by night and a pillar of fire to give them light that they may travel by day and by night.

[23 : 13] The pillar of cloud by day, the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before them. The idea is that the Lord went with them. The Lord fought for them. If you remember when he, he's the one that fought against the Egyptians.

The Lord, he went with them. He fought with them. He led them. He told them where to go. He dwelled with them in the tabernacle. If you remember, they were tent making, essentially.

They were tent camping, so to speak, through the wilderness. And they set up a tent in the middle of the camp for the Lord because he accompanied them. And so they walked with the Lord and they were with the Lord.

And then the presence of God sets them apart when they go into the land. And so if you remember Moses, that last little revelation with the Lord in Exodus 30, he's standing on the edge of the promised land.

The Lord says, you guys have disobeyed me too much. You go ahead. You lead them into the promised land. I'm staying here. And I love Moses' response. He's like, no way.

[24 : 12] But look what he says. 33, 15, and 16. And Moses said to him, if your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. For how shall it be known that I found favor in your sight, I and your people?

Is it not you're going with us so that we're distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?

It's the presence of God. It's not that they have a particular place. An altar. It's the presence of God that makes them unique. The Lord leads them into the land.

It sets them apart. They build a temple. Remember? They're kicked off the land. They come back and rebuild the temple. And they're weeping because they're fearful the Lord is not with them. And yet, again, the Lord reminds them that he is with them.

He sends Haggai this time. He says, be strong, O Zerubbabel, declares the Lord. Be strong, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest.

[25 : 13] Be strong, all you people of the Lord, declares the Lord. He says that to you this morning. Work, for I am with you, declares the Lord of hosts, according to the covenant that I made with you when you came out of Egypt.

My spirit remains in your midst. Fear not. That's what, I mean, I think that's the point. That's what sets the people of God apart. It's the presence of God.

His commitment to be with his people. Now, that little word, with, in a context like this, means so much.

There are a few more things more powerful than a friend who says, I'm with you. Whatever the courts decide. Or a father who says, son, I will be with you.

Or a lover who says, I'll never leave. We'll do anything for somebody who says that to us. Drew Holcomb, recording artist, I think captures it playfully.

[26 : 18] If I had a big, great big mansion, I'd rather live in a shotgun shack with you. If I drove a red Ferrari, I'd rather drive an Oldsmobile with you. If I want a million dollars, I'd give it all away to spend more time with you.

With you, I can be myself. With you, you know what I'm saying? With you, I don't have to be somebody else. It's like putting on my favorite pair of shoes. I don't know about that part. But then he says, I love this line.

I like to be with me when I'm with you. You'll feel like that. I don't like being with myself. I don't like being with me. But with you, I don't mind myself too much. But how much more when this word with is used for the Lord who says, I am with you.

This little word connects us to the living God. This little word encovers the most important discovery any man or woman can make. For in making this discovery, life is forever altered.

That the Lord is with you. No wonder the Lord is with you. The Lord is with you became a standard greeting in Israel. It's all you could ever want for someone else.

[27 : 24] It's all you could wish for someone else. It's all you could ever want for yourself. The Lord be with you. One of my favorite preachers on Twitter gets up there and often posts in the morning, the Lord be with you today.

And you might think, well, that's so commonplace. Couldn't he say something more inventive or creative? But actually, it's incredible. Oh, may the Lord be with you. And so it was the greeting, but it was also the goodbye in Israel in so many ways.

God be with you. That's where Star Wars, may the force be with you. It's just playing on even goodbye. Our word, English, goodbye, is taken from God be with you.

And so it begs the question, have you made this discovery? Have you come to see the profoundness of this promise? The Lord is with you. Has it sunk in and shaped every aspect of your life?

One day soon, your mother will no longer be with you. One day soon, your father will no longer be with you. One day soon, your brother and sister will no longer be with you.

[28 : 28] Your children will no longer be with you. Your spouse will no longer be with you. You will not even be with you when Alzheimer's and dementia take you.

But the Lord will be with you. I'll never forget. I'll never forget.

She'll do what she was able to do. She was cared for hospice on kind of the regular basis for several years. And then visits with them became more frequent when she got close to dying.

And it was clear she was about to die. We moved her to another facility. All the family came in, though she was unaware of who they were. And on one Tuesday morning, she died.

In God's kindness, a hospital chaplain was there. We were actually here.

[29 : 48] We were traveling around looking for a house. He'd gotten home from vacation the previous evening and felt strongly compelled to go visit Sonny.

That was Kim's mom that morning. We had gone, or Kim had gone, with her siblings that morning. And we'd already left to run some errands and things like that.

Come down here. But he was there. He went in and she stayed for, he stayed with her for a few minutes. He noticed that she was having trouble breathing.

So he stayed with her longer. As she continued to have trouble breathing, he sang Amazing Grace gently over her. And a tear fell from her eye.

And then she died. How kind of Lord to give us that memory, right? But what happened? What happened? We don't know if she's a Christian.

[30 : 57] We don't know whether she trusted in Christ. But we're not banking on that moment even. But it does make me wonder, was the Lord there?

Did those old refrains say to her, I am with you? I think so. I mean, he'll be with you too, all the way to the end.

Now, if we know anything about our Bibles at this point, we must ask, how could the Lord be with us? How could the Lord be with me?

There's no way. There's no way he could be with me. Not after how many times I drank too much. Not after how many times I've stumbled in the same filth.

Not after how many times or how often I spent so much of my life dismissing him and running from him and hiding from him. And this is where, at the end of our Bibles, this just gets better. Point three, the person of Jesus.

[32 : 06] The person of Jesus. Actually, flip with me to Matthew 1. Beginning in the New Testament. Jesus came to accompany his people in a way like never before.

Matthew 1, verse 21. If you look down there with me, he says, That's talking to Mary. And you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet.

Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son. They shall call his name Emmanuel, which means God with us. When Joseph woke from his sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him. He took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth.

And he called his name Jesus. And so we come to what is the fulfillment of so much of these things with the presence of God. This word, fulfill, runs throughout Matthew's gospel and reminds us that Jesus is the answer to promises about him.

One of these is Isaiah 7, 14, quoted here to show that Jesus was the promise to be born of a virgin. These words were originally written to comfort King Ahaz of Judah in the 8th century.

[33 : 14] Ahaz was facing many threats, and he concluded that there was no value trusting the Lord any longer. Maybe I should look to Assyria for help, which was a big no-no in that day.

But the Lord gives him a sign. He says, Ahaz, a son from your line will be born of a virgin. That's the sign.

And Ahaz has a son. By the time his son is old enough to speak, the threats against Judah have ceased. But the promise of this son continues to increase. And we see that in Isaiah 9, which we read last week.

To us, not just to Ahaz, to us a son is born. To us a son is given. Not just any son, but the son will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, the one whose government there shall be no end.

And so the people began to look and wait for a son, a greater son to come. And that's what Matthew is saying, that this son, this greater son, is Jesus Christ.

[34 : 09] He shall be called Emmanuel, for he's God with us. Now we must ask, though, what does it mean that God is with us, or that Jesus is God with us?

Is it just another sign that God's not left his people? Is this just another dream? Just another cloud? Just another fire? Just another pillar?

Just another wind? Just another promise? Or is Jesus God with us, meaning the human presence of God among his people? Now it becomes clear in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus speaks and acts as one who is truly and fully God.

So Jesus is not another sign through which the Lord tells his people he has not forgotten them. Jesus is the true son of God sent to be with his people. Jesus, this is the point, Jesus is the greater fulfillment of Jacob's dream.

The Lord tells Jacob in the dream, I will be with you, but the Lord sends Jesus, our Emmanuel, to be God with us. Jesus came to be God with us, to take on frail human flesh, to be 100% God, 100% man.

[35 : 24] That's why these carols have so much paradox in them. Jesus was made to be like us in every respect, yet without sin. He came to live as a creature, learning to hunger, thirst, hurt, and ache, so that he might sympathize with weak people and give mercy and grace in their time of need.

Jesus is God with us. But even more than that, Jesus is God for us. And we see that laid out throughout this Gospel, that the even better news is not merely that Jesus is God with us, as if all we needed was him to feel what we feel, but the even better news is that Jesus is God for us.

Sinclair Ferguson says, God with us has come to be God for us, by dying for us on the cross. And he came to be God for us on the cross, so that he could be God with us for the rest of our lives and into eternity, so that we would know his love for us.

Jesus is the answer to how God could be with guilty, hell-deserving sinners forever and ever and ever. Well, the greatest verse in the Bible is Revelation 22.5.

I'll be with my people. I'll be their God. They'll be my people. So that's not all. The end of Matthew points this home even more.

[36 : 44] Now, after celebrating all that Jesus accomplished and being God for us, Jesus tells us that he will be God with us forever. At the end of Matthew, Jesus promises his disciples, I'll be with you always to the end of the age.

So you get it. Matthew 1 says, Jesus is God with you. Now, Jesus says, I am with you. Now, obviously, this is a promise to the apostles that are about to take the Gospel all throughout the world and meet so many obstacles and suffer in so many ways, but it's also a promise for us when we put it up next to Genesis 28.

We see the dramatic fulfillment of this promise. So look with me there. I got these both passages up for you. He's fulfilling this by saying, I am with you.

If you look in Genesis 28.15, behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I've done what I promised to you. Matthew 28.20, behold, I am with you always.

I mean, those five words in a row, clear echo to Genesis 28, but it's not just there. If you look down, he promises blessing to all nations.

[37 : 50] Genesis 28.14, all the families of the earth will be blessed through you. The Great Commission, go therefore make disciples of all nations. Here's the idea, that the promise of the presence of God that will be with Jacob wherever he goes is extended to all nations through Jesus Christ, to every tribe, tongue, people, and nation.

To anyone that would come and call on him, the presence of God will go with him. The presence of Jesus Christ will go with him. So this is your promise. This is your promise.

Do not fear. The Lord your God will be with you wherever you go. I will be with you. Jesus Christ will be with you. Do not fear. God is in your midst. Do not fear.

The Lord will be with you in the valley of the shadow of death. His rod and staff will comfort you. Do not fear. When you pass through the waters, he will be with you.

When you walk through fire, you shall not be burned. Do not fear. The Lord of hosts is with you. The God of Jacob is your fortune. Do you see the God of Jacob, the God who never leaves, is with you to keep you and sustain you and to never leave you and to never fail you forever.

[39 : 09] Come on, 2020. The Lord is with me. A couple months ago, this is the only reason I'm a Christian.

He's never failed me yet. A couple months ago, I told you guys this, but Kim and I hiked Mount Lecombe, which is a must-see bucket list, and it's in your backyard.

Come on. And we stayed at the Lecombe Lodge. And we hiked up there with our little day packs and snacks and stuff.

Spent the night up there. We're walking around on top of the mountain, and it's part of the AT, the Appalachian Trail, and so there's a little shelter there, which is a little spot you can, if you don't want to sleep in your tent, you can sleep in the shelter.

And I'm from a little town called Rock Hill, South Carolina. And we're walking around, and we're walking around enjoying this area up there, and we're praying to the Lord.

[40 : 26] I told you guys that. We're not like super spiritual people, but we do love the Lord, and we're just praying, thanking the Lord, amazed by this beautiful sight. And we'll walk back to the shelter, and there's two bags sitting along the wall, and I walk up to them, and I look down, and there's a visor right there in big letters.

It says Rock Hill, South Carolina. Now, you may think I'm a wild-eyed charismatic, but you know what I receive that as?

The Lord telling me, I know exactly where you are. I haven't failed you yet, and I won't fail you in the future.

There's no coincidence, so don't fear. I'm praying for you this Christmas, regardless of whether the table is full or painfully missing, folks, this year.

Regardless of whether the future is bright or painfully dim. Regardless of whether this year has been marked by great strides of success or painful stumbles of failure. Do not fear. The Lord is with you wherever you go.

[41 : 37] May God help us. Father in heaven, we cast ourselves before you. We confess our need for you, and we thank you this morning for this wonderful promise that you will be with us wherever we go.

We receive it from you, Lord. We sink deep into it. Lord, we resolve to live with this in view.

Oh, Lord, would you come and reveal yourself to us? Would you come, just as you already have, attend to us, come by your Holy Spirit, send the Comforter to guide us and strengthen us and supply all that we need for this life and to follow you without fear until we meet you face to face in the age to come.

We thank you in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. You've been listening to a message given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at trinitygraceathens.com.

Amen.