

Opening Prayer

Scripture

Matthew 28:16-20

Message

Jesus' Promise: I Will Be With You

Following Jesus' death and Resurrection from the dead, the Gospel writers inform us that Jesus spent approximately 40 days with his disciples, his followers, teaching them, reminding them of the lessons He had been living out and teaching them for the previous 3 years. Following those 40 days, Jesus returned to Heaven. He ascended up from the earth out of their sight. This passage from Matthew tells us about a final time that Jesus gathered his followers together before leaving them. It is a very important passage for the Church. It is sometimes referred to as the **Great Commission**. He first of all reminds them of His authority to give them such a commission. God has placed all things under His authority. Everyone was accountable to Him. He would rule over God's people and all the earth. As the Lord, or Master of His disciples, Jesus gave them instructions about what they were to do while they remained in this world: **"Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."** (vs. 19). There are several commands:

- **Go** (Take initiative to go to people)
- **Make disciples** (persuade people to become as you – followers of me. They must abandon other religious paths)
- **Baptizing** – Making public their faith in Jesus, as a witness to others
- **Teach them to Obey** – not just put knowledge in their heads, but teach them in such a way that their lifestyle will change; they will obey my words

Then Jesus concludes these words with this promise – **"And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age."** (Vs. 20). These are important last words to His disciples, and every follower of Jesus must become familiar with them and must be involved in the Commission that Jesus has given us. But it is not my purpose today to dissect these 4 verses and look in detail at everything that is contained in these words. My primary focus today is to look at this promise that Jesus made – **I will be with you always**. As we read the gospels and put the timeline of Jesus' life together, we understand that sometime following this gathering, Jesus ascended up to heaven. I believe it would have been a short time later. **Luke 24:50-51** – **"When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven."** NOW, here is my issue: Jesus promises, **"I am with you always, to the very end of the age"** and then Luke tells us: **"He left them, and was taken up into heaven."** **If we can no longer see Jesus because He has been taken up into heaven, can He still be with us?** **If you can't see Him, is He there?**

Suppose that one of my children is afraid. Maybe they are afraid of the dark, or afraid of the monsters under their bed. If I hear them cry out and I go to comfort them, they may feel safe because I am laying with them in their bed. I am with them. But if I get up to go back to my bed, they may become afraid again. I could tell them, "Its ok, don't be afraid. I am still with you." But that would not be a true statement. If they are thinking rationally, they would know better. They would know that I am not really with them. In order for them to feel safe, I would have to stay with them through the night. We understand that when someone is present with us, they are "here", or "visible", or "close by." But Jesus expects us to be comforted by His promise to be with us, even though He leaves to go back to heaven. We are to believe that He is with us, even though we cannot see Him.

We must first of all understand Jesus' promise in the context of these verses. As we are obeying Him and fulfilling this Great Commission of Making Disciples, Jesus promises to be with us. But I believe that we can safely understand that Jesus' promise to be with us always, extends to all areas of our lives as His followers. He will be with us Always. But how are we to understand how Jesus fulfills this promise. How can we believe that He is WITH us even when we cannot see him in the same room with us.

As the 2nd person of the Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – Jesus’ promise to be present with His people is one of many promises made by God to be present with His people. I don’t have time to read all of the passages, but there are several that I would note:

Exodus 33:12-14 ¹² *Moses said to the LORD, “You have been telling me, ‘Lead these people,’ but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. You have said, ‘I know you by name and you have found favor with me.’* ¹³ *If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you. Remember that this nation is your people.”*

¹⁴ *The LORD replied, “My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.”*

Isaiah 41:10 - *So do not fear, for I am with you;
do not be dismayed, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you and help you;
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*

Isaiah 43:1-2 *But now, this is what the LORD says—
he who created you, Jacob,
he who formed you, Israel:
“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have summoned you by name; you are mine.*
² *When you pass through the waters,
I will be with you;
and when you pass through the rivers,
they will not sweep over you.
When you walk through the fire,
you will not be burned;
the flames will not set you ablaze.*

Psalms 23:4 – *“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will not be afraid, for you are with me.”*

There are many other references that I could cite to support this position that God has promised to be with us. But again we ask the question, ***If He is not visible to us, is He with us?*** Now, another question comes to mind: ***How can God be present with more than one person at the same time?*** We learn in the Bible that God is different than humans. Humans have a physical body and therefore are limited in space. We can’t be two places at the same time. But Jesus tells us that God is Spirit (John 4:24). Therefore He is not limited to space. He can be present while not being seen. He can be at more than one place at the same time. And he can be close to more than one person at the same time. Jesus, who after His resurrection had a “glorified body”, He now shares all of the characteristics that we know to be true about God. So He can be present while not being physically present. He can be with us, even when we do not see Him.

We must also understand that His presence is Real. He is not like an imaginary friend. Some children have imaginary friends. They make them up in their minds. They may believe that they are real, but they are not of course. BUT when Jesus is present with us, He is real. 20th century theologian A. W. Tozer writes about this:

“...the practice of the presence of God consists not of projecting an imaginary object from within his own mind and then seeking to realize its presence; it is rather to recognize the real presence of the ONE whom all sound theology declares to be already there, an objective entity, ... The resultant experience is not visionary but real.”

Jesus Himself really is present with us. His presence is as real as it would be if we could see Him physically, standing right beside us. To understand this requires faith. It requires a change in the way we think. But we must understand that His presence is real.

Now, why is this a big deal. I don't know why God led my heart to this passage today. I do know that I myself have been encouraged to remember that Jesus' presence is as real as these candles behind me, or the pulpit behind me. He really is standing right here with me. Perhaps there are some who also needed to be reminded of this reality today. There are some very practical points to consider as we remember Jesus' promise. ***I am with you even to the end of the age.***

- Heb. 13:5 – Keep yourself from the love of money, BE CONTENT, Because God says He will never leave us or forsake us. For anyone who may be fearful or anxious about having enough material resources to get through life, God will never leave you or forsake you.
- Ps. 23:4 – For those who may be navigating through a dark season in your life – a valley of the shadow of death – perhaps a season of grief and sadness, take heart, because you are not alone. He IS with you
- Is. 43: - When you are in a dangerous place, and it feels like the floods are about to sweep over you and destroy you, remember He is with you. This season of Pandemic has not been easy. Anxiety, stress, build up and sends us into a panic. He is with you.
- Exodus 33:14 – When you need guidance about where your life is going, guidance for decisions that you must make about your future, remember that He promises His presence.

Take courage today. Jesus says, "***Surely I am with you always, even to the end of the age.***"

Amen