

Presence

Series: Promises of God

Matthew 28:20b

August 9, 2020

The story goes of a 42-year-old woman from South Bend, Indiana. She had been approached by a man who offered her a great deal on a new flat-screen TV for only \$500 dollars. She admitted it was a great deal but did not have the money. So, he lowered the price to \$300 dollars. She gave him the money. The set was bubble-wrapped, had Wal-Mart stickers on it, and came with a remote control--but when she unwrapped it, she discovered it was an oven door! The outside packaging promised a TV; the inside produced an oven door.

We all depend upon promises. "Guaranteed to last forever." "Until we are parted by death." "Exactly what you need." "It's safe."

There are countless promises made to us in our lives. But it seems more times than not that a promise made is a promise unkept. Is there anything in this world we can rely on to last?

For the next seven weeks, we will look seven "Promises of God." Seven promises that we can believe in, as certain as the dawn of a new day.

I invite you to turn to page 5 in your bulletin. I want to look at Matthew 28. I'm going to back up and read a few verses beforehand:

Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you."¹

And now the verse I want to look at:

And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.²

It must have been a staggering thing for eleven humble disciples to be sent forth to the conquest of the world. Even as they heard it, their hearts must have failed them.

I still remember it was if it were yesterday. I had been learning to fly for 3 months now. The first two months, I had flown just 5 times. Then I realized that was not enough; I need to be in the air and learning how to fly more. So, in the next 18 days, I had flown 5 more times. So, on a cloudy day in December, I had scheduled another lesson. Marty and Matt were with me; they hung out in the main building. I had gone into this lesson trying to hammer out my landing skills.

After 30 minutes of lesson time and 5 landings, my instructor told me to taxi the airplane to the main building. I thought I had done something wrong. We stopped; he looked at me and said, "You're ready. Go do three more take-offs and landings... by yourself!"

I have to tell you, I was stunned. Was I ready? What if I wasn't? I certainly would not want my boys to watch me die.

I taxied to the end of the runway and prayed, "Oh, God, please help me not kill myself!" I advanced the throttle, the airplane began to roll, faster and faster, until it leapt off the runway quicker than any take-off previously. I was startled by it, yelled out a

¹ Matthew 28:18-20a (NLT2)

² Matthew 28:20b (NLT2)

“Wahoo!” then quickly realized, “I’ve now got to get this airplane down.” Of course, the Lord was with me, but the voice of my instructor was as well. Every guidance, every technique, every tool, I could hear in my head. That day, December 23, 2000, was my first solo flight. To this day, 647 take-off and landings later, I still hear Bruce’s instructions as if he was there.

Jesus had just commanded the 11 remaining disciples to:

go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you.”³

Then He said:

And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.⁴

No sooner had He given the command, then the promise followed. They were sent out – as we are – on the greatest task in history, but with them, there was the greatest presence in the world.⁵

What does the promise of Christ’s presence mean?

First, it means Certainty. There is an emphasis in this promise. “Be sure of this.” The King James says, “Lo”, while the New Revised Standard says, “And remember,” and the NIV says, “Surely.” The Greek word signifies importance. This promise is very important. It not only provides the motivation for fulfilling the Great Commission. It provides the confidence in doing it.

In fact, Christ’s presence is exactly Who He is. Do you remember this Christmas story of the angel appearing to Joseph?

As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. “Joseph, son of David,” the angel said, “do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord’s message through his prophet: “Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means ‘God is with us.’”⁶

Immanuel. God is with us. That is a certainty.

Second, it means Essence. Jesus says, “I am...” The Greek is *ego eimi*.⁷

To understand fully what *ego eimi* means, we have to go back to Exodus 3 and the calling of Moses. Remember, Moses was born in Egypt and raised as a prince for 40 years. He left Egypt and spent the next forty years living as a shepherd. Then one day, he saw a bush that burned but was not consumed. And God called him to deliver the Israelites from Egyptian bondage. Moses responded and told God how he couldn’t do it. Then he had this back-and-forth exchange with God. Finally verses 13-14:

But Moses protested, “If I go to the people of Israel and tell them, ‘The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,’ they will ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what should I tell them?” God replied to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM. Say this to the people of Israel: I AM has sent me to you.”⁸

³ Matthew 28:19-20a (NLT2)

⁴ Matthew 28:20b (NLT2)

⁵ Barclay’s Daily Study Bible, Matthew 28:16-20

⁶ Matthew 1:20-23 (NLT2)

⁷ εγω ειμι

⁸ Exodus 3:13-14 (NLT)

God called Himself I AM (Hebrew YHWH, as biblical Hebrew was written with consonants only). “Yahweh”: a name describing His eternal power and unchangeable character. I am.

Fast forward to Jesus. The Greek equivalent of YHWH is *ego eimi*. So, when Jesus used *ego eimi*, He was equating Himself with God, God Who is everywhere and at all times.

This promise of His presence emphasizes the Deity of Christ, for only God could make this promise of omnipresence.

The presence of Christ was the essence of the promise.

Third, it means Encouragement.

Jesus said, “I am with you.”

This is the encouragement in the promise.

Moses would not travel without God’s presence. God speaks to Moses in Exodus 33:15:

“I will personally go with you, Moses, and I will give you rest—everything will be fine for you.” Then Moses said, “If you don’t personally go with us, don’t make us leave this place.”⁹

It is the presence of Christ that encourages us, whether we are taking on a world transforming task or dealing with our own upside down world, Christ’s promise of His presence is an encouragement. Remember King David’s words?

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me;¹⁰

And how do we know His is with us? When we are together. Jesus said in Matthew 18:20:

And when two or three of you are together because of me, you can be sure that I’ll be there.¹¹

Remember when children are young, they are mostly afraid of new situations, new settings, new experiences. I remember holding Matthew as a little boy to help him through those times.

It is the same with Jesus. He is holding on to you.

There is an old hymn whose words go like this:

It may be in the valley, where countless dangers hide;

It may be in the sunshine that I, in peace, abide;

But this one thing I know—if it be dark or fair,

If Jesus is with me, I’ll go anywhere!

Refrain: If Jesus goes with me, I’ll go anywhere!

‘Tis heaven to me, where’er I may be, if He is there!

I count it a privilege here, His cross to bear,

If Jesus goes with me, I’ll go anywhere!¹²

Finally, it means Extent.

And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.¹³

⁹ Exodus 33:14-15 (NLT2)

¹⁰ Psalm 23:4 (ESV)

¹¹ Matthew 18:20 (MSG)

¹² “If Jesus Goes with Me” by Charles A. Miles

¹³ Matthew 28:20b (NLT2)

He is talking about the end of the world here. And by all appearances, we believe we are in the end times. But no matter how difficult or how frightening or how painful it might be, Jesus promises to be with us all the way.

No matter what you are doing. Whether you are going through a storm, Jesus is with you every day. Or if you are seeking His face, He is with you every day. Or during the midst of a global pandemic, He is with you every day. Or you are going and making disciples of all the nations, Jesus is with you every day!

Hebrews 13:5 reads:

...God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."¹⁴

That is good English, but it is not good Greek in this instance.

This verse contains an unusual triple negative. That is not good English, but it is good Greek. In English, a double negative is a positive. "I will not not help you" means I will help you. But in Greek, a double negative intensifies the negative, and a triple negative, wow. So Hebrews 13:5 should be translated, "He will never, never, never leave us or forsake us."

As I meditated on this verse, I wonder if this isn't the heart of God speaking to a hurting child to remind that little one that He is there always. And who is God? The three in One. The One in three. Then I saw this truth:

"Father, I am so weak. I have failed You in so many ways. Will You ever leave me?"

The Father looked at me and said, "No, I will never leave you. I created you!"

The Son looked at me and said, "No, I will never leave you. I died for you!"

The Holy Spirit looked at me and said, "No, I will never leave you. I dwell inside of you!"

Wow. That should confirm to you once and for all that you are not alone in this life. And you will never be alone because of His promises.

¹⁴ Hebrews 13:5 (NIV)