

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR
"Jesus' Parting Promise: I Am With You Always"
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Dear Radio Friends,

Forty days after His resurrection from the dead, Jesus, in His human body, left the earth and ascended into heaven. The truth of Jesus' ascension is of great benefit to us as believers here in the world. It not only reminds us of the reality of Jesus' life on earth, the time that He spent with His disciples, His life and ministry, His death and resurrection, and all the blessings of salvation that are ours because of what He did prior to His ascension. But it should also cause us to lift our thoughts and meditation to where Jesus is today and to what He does there. As our ascended Savior, Jesus has been given all power in heaven and in earth. He rules all things from the right hand of God's power. He lives as our Mediator in the presence of God, making continual intercession for us. And He sends forth great blessings into the world for us His people who remain on the earth.

Today we are going to look at Jesus' parting promise to His disciples as recorded in the last part of the last verse of the gospel of Matthew, Matthew 28:20: "And, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

How important and how precious these last words of Jesus must have been to the disciples. For several years they had lived and walked with Him. He had become their Friend and their Leader, on whom they depended. Just recently He had been taken from them in death. How distressing and sad that had been for them. Then He arose and He was with them again. How they treasured His presence. But now, in His ascension, Jesus is leaving them again. And this time His departure is permanent. Again the disciples are distressed. [Acts 1](#) tells us that they gazed up into heaven after His departure. That was a longing and a questioning gaze. Where has He gone? Why has He gone? Is He coming back? But ringing in their ears were these last words of Jesus: "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

It is easy for us to overlook these words. They fall in the shadow of the great commission of [Matthew 28:19](#) and 20, where Jesus says, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." In this commission Jesus tells not only His disciples, but the church and believers in every age, why He leaves them behind on the earth. We are here to be witnesses of Christ and to bring the gospel to the nations. In this commission Jesus is saying to the disciples, "I am leaving you here in the world with the task of teaching all nations, of bringing the gospel to the ends of the earth." How they must have wondered, "How are we to do this? How are we to do it without our Lord?" How they must have balked at the great task that Jesus gave them.

To these distressed and now alone disciples, Jesus gives this promise: "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." How precious the words of this promise must have been to the disciples.

This promise is also for us today, two thousand years later. What a promise it is for us. How we need the presence of Jesus. Just think of what it would mean if we were alone in this world without the presence of Christ. How awful it is to be alone. God created us for communion and for fellowship, not only with one another, but with Himself. He created us with a desire for fellowship with others—not just for the

joy that that brings, but also for the companionship and the strength that comes with relationships. And He made man to be His friend and His dependent. As a Christian in the world, you know what that means. You know what it is to walk with God. You know what it is to depend on God in prayer. You know what it is to find strength from God as He speaks to you in the Scriptures, in the troubles of your life.

Imagine, once, life without the presence of your Savior. How awful. Jacob, at one time, felt alone. When Jacob was at Bethel, fleeing from his murderous brother Esau, he felt all alone. How terrible. But God came to him in a dream—the dream of a ladder reaching to heaven. After Jacob saw it, he said: “Surely God is in this place.” And he could go on, because he knew the presence of God.

Moses also feared being left alone by God. In Exodus 33 Moses, understanding the great task that he had of leading God’s people through the wilderness to Canaan, and knowing his own insufficiency for this task, insisted that he could not do this alone. And so God says, “My presence shall go with thee. And I will give thee rest.” Because of this, Moses could go on. He says in Exodus 33:15, “If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence.” It is the presence of God and of Christ that gives us strength to go on in this world.

The presence of Christ is His grace. It is the power of Christ coming to us personally to help us and support us. It is not just the knowledge that God is everywhere present and all-powerful. But it is to know the presence of His grace with us to strengthen us. When Paul says, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me,” he means that the power of God’s grace in Christ was his strength. As God says to Paul in another place, “My grace is sufficient for thee.” What a grace. Not just for the individual but also for the church of God in this world. The disciples to whom Jesus speaks this promise represent the New Testament church. Christ is in and with His church.

And, oh, how we need the presence of Christ. One reason we need it is that we have a great task to do. That task is given first in the great commission. Our task as believers in this world and as the church of God is to go into all the world and teach the gospel to sinners. How we need the presence of Christ for this! The disciples felt that need. They were a band of uneducated Galileans. To them Christ said, “Go into all the world and teach all nations.” They must have thought, “But, Jesus, *you* are the teacher. We are here to learn not to teach.”

This great commission, to teach, also applies in the church, and the work within the church and in our Christian homes, teaching and baptizing our own covenant children. It applies today to parents, to officebearers, to elders in the church, to school teachers, to all of us as we relate to one another and edify one another in the body of Christ. Any one of us who is involved in this knows how difficult this is.

But this is not the only task that we have in this world. Our task also includes all our spiritual warfare against the enemies of the world and Satan and the flesh. We are called to a constant daily battle with sin. How we need the presence and power of Christ in this. Our task includes bearing all the burdens and troubles of life, the grief, the sickness, the poverty, the concerns, and the anxieties about the future. It includes persecution for the church and for the believer. For the disciples, this was a real fear. The Jews hated them. And they hated the gospel of Christ. The disciples faced opposition in this world in their task of teaching the gospel. All through the history of the world, to a greater or lesser degree, the church has been persecuted.

And there is in the future for the church the Great Tribulation. How we need the presence of Christ.

What shows our need even more is our own insufficiency, our frailty and weakness, and the fact that human help always fails. It never endures. You can look at this from the personal point of view of your own life. The task and responsibilities that you have, the struggles that you experience, the attacks on your faith, the temptations that you face—how weak we are.

Just think of Peter. He had boasted that he was strong, that he would not deny his Lord. But he found out when he denied the Lord how weak he really was. He was restored as a disciple. But he needed the presence of the Lord. Imagine how he wanted to cling to the Lord.

We are so weak that we cannot stand for a moment. In her great commission, the church finds out that she is weak. Speaking of his preaching task, Paul says: "And who is sufficient for these things?" When you look at the history of the church from an external point of view, it is a story of weakness and of failings. Even today the church is small. Its leaders are weak men, earthen vessels. They come and they go. Our human inadequacy shows that we need the presence of Christ.

To the church and believer in this world, weak and faced with a great task, comes the promise of Christ: "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." That is an enduring promise, an enduring promise of Christ's constant, unending presence with His church and with believers, from now, no, from the time of the ascension till the time of the second coming of Jesus Christ. Jesus says, "I am with you till the end of the world."

On the lips of the ascended Christ, those are beautiful, beautiful words. For, first, when Christ says "the end of the world," He has in mind the time when He will come again on the clouds of heaven with all His holy angels. As He leaves, Christ has His second coming in mind. In [John 14](#): "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, that I may receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also." It has been almost 2,000 years since Christ ascended. But, do you know, that His mind from then till now has never drifted from the end of time and His coming again? He comes.

Also the word "end" refers to the purpose of Christ. He has a goal and a purpose in all things. His goal for us is not what we have here and now in time. But His goal is the glory of His church and people in the new heavens and the new earth. Not only does He have His mind on the second coming, but He has His mind, as He leaves, on the glory that is beyond it. This is the end.

Then also the word "end" refers to the difficult things that the church will have to go through immediately before the coming of Christ—what is called in the Bible the Great Tribulation. During that time the Antichrist will come. There will be a massive worldwide hatred for truth and for Christians, with bitter persecution. And when Jesus speaks of being with us till the end, He has this in mind, this is His promise: "All the time from now till My return, in all the difficulties that you will face as believers and as church, I will not only be thinking of you and remembering you before God in my intercession; I will not only be ruling all things for your advantage and salvation from My exalted position in heaven; but I will be with you—I will go through all those experiences with you; I will be there as your strength and support as the One on whom you can lean and depend. I will never leave you alone." That is what Jesus Christ is promising. And His promises never fail.

As we think of the ascended Christ, we should not just think of Him as exalted in His human nature at God's right hand. We should not just think of Him as bodily absent from us. But we should remember that He is, in a very real and powerful and supportive way, with us here today. He is with you as a Christian. He is with the church, which is His body and bride. In all that we face in this world, in our great task, in our weaknesses, we are never alone. In [Hebrews 13:5](#) you have a beautiful promise taken from the Old Testament and brought into the New. It reads: "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." But in the Greek language, the original text of the New Testament, it is put much more strongly, with five negatives, something like this: "I will never, never, never, never, never leave or forsake thee." That is the promise of Christ that can never fail.

How is Jesus with us? Well, it is not the same as when He was with His disciples, is it? No. It is not. His presence today is far greater and much more powerful than His physical presence with His disciples. How is He with us today? He is with us by His Word and Spirit. When we say that He is with us by the Word, we mean, first, that He has given us the Scriptures, the living Word of God, which is profitable for us for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction, for comfort, for encouragement, for admonition. The Scriptures open up and reveal to us the way of salvation and Jesus Christ. They give us all that we need to know for our faith and life. They contain God's will for the church and God's will for your life and mine. They are the powerful presence of Christ with the church. Just think what a strength the Bible has been to the church throughout the ages.

But Christ being present by the Word means also that He is with us in the preaching of the gospel, which

He has ordained as the way to communicate the Word to sinners. He is with us in the church. He is with us in the officebearers that He has given in the church. And He is with us in the preaching that He calls the church to do. Preaching is one of the greatest gifts of the ascended Christ. In Ephesians 4:10-13, "He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things. And he gave [these are the gifts that the ascended Christ gave] some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." In the true preaching of the Word, Christ is with His church to nourish her, to feed her, to edify believers, to bring us forward to the day when we will be perfected with Christ and all believers. In the preaching, we have the power and the presence of the ascended Christ.

And then, closely tied to that, another means in which Christ is with us is by the means of prayer. Prayer is a gift. This is the way of close communion with Christ. He taught His disciples and His church to pray. And He left them with the gift of prayer and great promises. In [Acts 1:14](#) we read of the early New Testament that they "all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication." Christ was with them. We know the presence of Christ as we draw near to Him in prayer.

Then also, Christ is with us by the implanting of His Word in our hearts so that we live and walk with Him in holiness. If you read the New Testament letters, and especially the letter to the Ephesians, you see that Paul talks about being "in Christ" and Christ "in you." What does that mean? Well, it means that we are new creatures because of Christ's life in us that draws us heavenward in our thinking and talking and living. Christ in us. Paul says, "We don't live any more; but Christ lives in us, so that the life I live," he says, "I live by the faith of the Son of God." Jesus lives in us. The power of the resurrection life of Christ is implanted by God within us so that His Word lives in our souls and makes us new creatures.

Christ is with us in these very real ways till the end of time. And all of this is by the power of the Holy Spirit whom He has given to us.

When the disciples were distressed at the thought of Jesus leaving them, Jesus said, "No, it's better for you if I go away, because then I will come back to you in the Spirit, which is much better for you." He says in John 16:7, "It is expedient for you [or better for you, or necessary for your good] that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you."

The power of the Spirit is not localized. The Spirit does not come into the New Testament church with limits. But the Spirit, who is God Himself, comes with all the power and godhead into the church and into the heart of every one of God's elect children left behind in the earth. He works in them, and He works through them, to equip them, to bring them God's grace, to make them fruitful in godliness and good works, to recreate them after the image of Christ, to give them the perspective of faith and a spiritual outlook on things.

The Spirit's presence is real. The Spirit's presence is powerful. Where there is darkness and ignorance and ungodliness, the Spirit brings light and knowledge and holiness. Where we are weak, where human help fails us, then Christ remains with us by the Spirit, with all His people, over all the earth, till the end of time. This is what Christ means when He says, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

And that, dear Christian friends, ought to be a great comfort and encouragement to you. Are you going through trying circumstances in your life? Are you slandered and persecuted because of your faith? Are you fearful and anxious about the future? Is your task as a Christian (parent or teacher or officebearer) so great that you feel insufficient? Are you in the way of sorrow and grief in this life? Do you experience loneliness? It does not matter where you are as a Christian, Christ is there with you. There is never a moment, never a place, never a believer, never a true church from which Christ can be separated. His own word, His promise here, ties Him to us till the end of the world.

That is our confidence. From heaven He rules as the ascended Lord, by His Word He guides us, and in the power of the Spirit He is with us. Wherever you are, whatever you face as a child of God, you can be

sure of this: Christ will never leave you.

Let us pray.

Lord, we are weak. And our work is great. But what confidence we have as we rest in Christ who is with us always, even till the end. Guide us, we pray, by the Word and with the Spirit, till that day when Christ will come again. Amen.