

GOD WITH US

(Sermon Summary)

Reading: Matthew 1: 18-25.

There is no more comforting truth than this for the believer, that God is with us. In many ways it is so obvious that He is with us. Why should we doubt it? One of the names of our Lord Jesus Christ is Immanuel, which means 'God with us.' It is the culmination of the plan of redemption that this should be so manifestly true by the coming of the Lord Jesus into the world. It was a promise first made to apostate King Ahaz in Isaiah 7: 14. He had no ears to hear it. Yet the implications of that promise are immense and continue with us to this day. So it is a thought to carry forward on into the summer. Indeed, when we reflect on the last nearly three years, how we have seen that promise fulfilled again and again in remarkable ways. It has been a time for much heart-searching, self-discovery, yearning and prayer as well as rejoicing and thanksgiving.

1. This was not spoken for an easy time.

The promise that God is with us is for us to hear when times are difficult. Think about when it was spoken to Joseph. It was not a promise given at any easy time for the nation. They were under Roman occupation, which was very traumatic and humiliating, leaving the people wondering what kind of future, if any, lay ahead for them. They felt powerless and without any right of self-determination. Neither was it an easy time for Joseph personally to be hearing this promise. He was feeling confused, humiliated, and heart-broken that the young woman, of whom he had such high hopes, was found with child. He must have questioned himself whether he had fooled himself, and entertained false hopes regarding Mary. So, into that sadness, anger and confusion the Lord spoke to Joseph.

For Joseph and for the nation, they had to realize that there was a greater plan that God had and that these circumstances were part of that greater plan. He was with the nation and had now come to save His people. He was with Joseph and was now speaking to him to allay his fears and show him that his choice of Mary was very sound.

2. We can feel we are on our own.

We can feel that we are on a 'lonely planet', without aid and very much on our own. Things can seem so random, and it is as if there is no-one there to care for us. The church in the West can seem so small and powerless against people and their ideas. The church in the wider world can seem so under threat from the influence of radical Islam. We are

such small people, influenced by global events such as pandemics, things we have no control over.

It is instructive at times to stop and consider the glory of God. He does not owe us a quiet and happy existence. We might think that we have often in our lives been at the proverbial 'wrong place at the wrong time' and forget that God is working all things together for good. Our sense of loneliness can engulf us and prevent us thinking clearly about the Lord's presence with His people. It has led some to invent fake signs and wonders to try to generate a sense of the Lord with His people when He has, of course, been with them all along.

3. But God is with us.

It was the message that the Lord gave to the discouraged builders after the exile in Jerusalem who had stalled in their work of re-building the temple. He spoke to them to tell them that He was with them (Haggai 1:13). The simple re-assurance to His discouraged people was perhaps an answer to their prayers. They had felt themselves to be small and on their own. The Lord assured them of His continuing love and interest towards them. At times of uncertainty, the Lord would give direction to His people, such as when Abraham found encouragement when he needed it (Genesis 17:1) or Jacob at Bethel (Genesis 28:15).

The Lord, who is with us, has a route for us to take us through life and all the uncertainties of it. There is guidance that the Lord is able and willing to give us to guide us when perplexed. As we follow Him, we are able to serve the Lord as He would have us serve Him.

He is able to give us comfort so that He speaks to us through the still small voice. We recognise when we are facing difficult choices what the best way forward for us is. The result of this is that we have a growing and developing testimony of the Lord being with us which gives us more faith for the future. God is able to show us that He is with us through the timeless truths of the Bible that speak to us still today and will continue to speak to us until we leave for glory. God is also able to show that He is with us through fellow believers who can make vital contributions at critical moments to encourage us.

Joseph receives confirmation that the Lord is with His people at a vital moment for himself and for the nation. The same Lord can encourage us too, and show us, throughout all our lives, that He is with us and always will be.