

A Deeper Walk With Jesus

Part 3 – The Abiding Presence of God

ILLUS – All he wanted to do was die. It took only a few days in the life of this particular man of God to go from his greatest triumph, and the greatest public demonstration of God’s power in his ministry to sink to the point where he was crying out to God to kill him. One day he is leading the nation, instructing the king, and commanding the weather, and the next he is fleeing for his life. One day he is a hero, the next Queen Jezebel has a contract out on his life. And the great prophet Elijah took off for the wilderness where he prayed for death to come. Then he journeyed almost six weeks and hid in a cave. Fearful, lonely, and full of despair, his prayer went something like this: “Lord, I have been so zealous for You. And now I am completely alone and they are trying to kill me.”

Something Elijah didn’t understand: You may feel lonely, but you’re never alone.

We are continuing today in our series on A Deeper Walk With Jesus, and in this message, I want to talk about The Abiding Presence of God.

I want to give you three important pieces of information that you need to know as you do life.

1. God is with you wherever you go

Mat 28:18-20 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. (19) Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, (20) teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.

The last words of Jesus on this earth that Matthew records are, “I am with you (Gk: plural) always, even to the end of the age.”

How was He ever going to do that?

How could He be with all of His disciples at the same time?

I love everything about the Incarnation.

Almighty God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – three Persons, yet one God.

The second Person in this triune God – Jesus – takes on human form.

That’s the Incarnation – God coming in the form of a man.

Imagine that: God Himself squeezing Himself into a teeny weeny human body.

But He did it.

But Jesus knew that it was always going to present a problem.

You can’t be unlimited when you are limited.

ILLUS – If Jesus was in Jerusalem, the people in Jericho couldn’t talk to Him. If He was in Jericho, the people in Bethlehem couldn’t talk to Him. When Lazarus was dying, they had to send for Jesus for the perfectly logical reason that Jesus wasn’t already there. When the daughter of Jairus was dying, Jairus had to go looking for Jesus because Jesus was limited to one place.

For all the miracles and the signs and the wonders that He did, Jesus could still only be in one place at one time.

So how could He be with us all till the end of the age?

Jesus went back into heaven and sent the Holy Spirit.

John 16:7 Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you.

If you are a believer in Jesus, then He is always with you by His Spirit.

And that means that you may feel lonely, but you are never alone.

No matter what you are going through: You may be going through the best time of your life, or the worst; you may be filled with gratitude, peace and joy, or you may be despairing; you may be experiencing anticipation and hope, or you may be discouraged.

But you are never alone; God is with you by His Spirit in everything you go through.

2. God will guide you wherever you go

ILLUS – I probably have the world's worst sense of direction. Give me a map and I can find my way to anywhere. I'll look once at the map, maybe even twice, and I'll remember the way. But if I have to go there for the next three or four days in a row, I will probably have to look at the map each time. People tell me they live in a particular suburb, and I ask them, "Where is that?", and I can see them looking at me and thinking, "When did you say you came to live in Australia?" Well, actually it was 1964, but living in Brisbane all that time hasn't helped me much in finding my way around. If I'm on the phone, and someone asks me for directions to somewhere, I say, "Hang on. You need to talk to somebody who knows what they're talking about. I'll pass you on to my wife."

I'm working at it and I'm slowly getting better.

But do you know what's far worse than not being able to find your way around the suburbs without a map?

Not being able to find your way through life.

Many people are like I used to be before I knew Jesus: Directionless.

Like ships without a rudder, blowing aimlessly in the breeze; just floating in the direction of wherever the strongest current happens to going.

ILLUS – Charlie Brown, the comic strip character, was playing with a bow and arrow. And his mean little friend, Lucy, came along and found tree after tree all around with targets painted on them. And right in the middle of the target, in the bullseye, there was Charlie Brown's arrow. She said, "Charlie Brown, you have really gone up in my estimation. I had no idea that you were so good at archery." Then she wandered away and hid and watched. Charlie Brown shot an arrow, hit a tree, then he painted a bullseye around it.

A lot of people are like that: No particular direction, wandering aimlessly through life, and whatever they happen to hit, that becomes what they were aiming for.

And along the journey of life, life is so complicated; there are so many mountains, so many valleys; so many rivers to cross and so many deep woods to find your way through.

And there's an unseen enemy who's trying to sabotage every step of the way.

If there's one thing we need in life, it's a guide.

John 16:13 However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.

The Holy Spirit is our Guide.

That's what He does.

Perhaps you are experiencing some uncertainty about the future.

Perhaps you have decisions that you have to make and you don't know what to do.

You may feel lonely, but you are never alone; God is there to guide you.

ILLUS – Author Peter Lord was skiing in Colorado, and he saw some people wearing red vests, and on the red vests were the words BLIND SKIER. He thought to himself, “I have a hard enough time skiing with two good eyes, how can they ski successfully with none?” He soon found out – they completely trusted and followed the instructions of their guide! The guide skied next to them, tapping his ski poles together to let them know he was there. Then he’d say, “Turn right! Turn left! Stop! Slow down! Skier coming up on your right!”¹

Just imagine the level of trust that blind skier has to have.

And that’s the kind of trust we need to have in the Holy Spirit’s guidance.

3. Being in His presence requires faith

ILLUS – Just imagine this: A homeless person, living hand to mouth, just getting by, taking whatever handouts he can get. And a wealthy relative dies and leaves him \$10 million. And for whatever reason – ignorance, apathy, the desire to prove something – he never accesses that money, but day after day he continues to live on the streets, scrounging for food. He has this colossal amount of money in the bank, but he is living like a pauper.

You can have something legally, but not have it experientially.

This is also the case with spiritual truths.

Jesus said, “I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

And yet, Heb 4:16 says, “Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

On the one hand we have the promise of the abiding presence of God.

But on the other hand, we have to come before the throne of grace to be in His presence.

Do we have the presence of God, or not?

This is the thing: You can have something legally, but not have it experientially.

Your legal standing, we call your position.

Your actual experience is what we call your possession.

ILLUS – When God brought Israel out of Egypt, He gave them the land of Canaan. Legally, or positionally, it was theirs. But it took them many years before they actually possessed it experientially.

What makes the difference between position and possession?

How do we take something that’s a legal fact, and make it into an experienced reality?

The key is faith.

All the promises of God are accessed by faith.

In fact, “Without faith it is impossible to please Him...” (Heb 11:6)

But I’ve noticed that so often, non-Christians have more faith in their own limited ability, than some Christians have in the unlimited power of God.

It is said that when Columbus set out he didn’t know where he was going, when he arrived he didn’t know where he was, and when he returned he didn’t know where he’d been.²

That’s a kind of faith, isn’t it?

And in the middle of all those ‘didn’t knows’ he made a discovery that was to change the course of world events.

I wonder how the world would change if every Christian exercised the kind of faith that turned their position into possession.

One man did exactly that: He didn’t want the presence of God to be a mere concept.

He used his faith to make it a daily reality in his life.

ILLUS – In 1632, God spoke into the life of a poor 18-year-old Frenchman named Nicholas Herman. After six years, he joined a monastery where he was put on kitchen duties. Fifty-four years later, in 1691, he died in pain and relative obscurity. But after his death, correspondence and conversations with him were published under the name he took when he entered the monastery. It became one of the greatest Christian classics of all time. *The Practice of the Presence of God* by Brother Lawrence.

For over half a century, Brother Lawrence devoted himself to living in the presence of God, no matter how menial or tedious his work might be.

He wrote this: "... it is not necessary to have great things to do. I turn my little omelette in the pan for the love of God; when it is finished, if I have nothing to do, I prostrate myself on the ground and adore my God, Who gave me the grace to make it, after which I arise, more content than a king. When I cannot do anything else, it is enough for me to have lifted a straw from the earth for the love of God."³

Brother Lawrence had learned one of the great secrets in life about the presence of God.

He experienced God's presence, not just in church, not just in prayer, not just while reading his Bible.

But he learned to live constantly in the presence of God – by faith.

Faith is the key.

Faith means knowing that, while you may be lonely, you are never alone because of the abiding presence of God.

Now let's go back to the man we started talking about at the beginning of this message.

ILLUS – Elijah is holed up in his cave. There's a warrant out for his arrest and execution. He's feeling sorry for himself, miserable, suicidal. He feels abandoned, the only one who's serving God, the only one who's faithful. And then God interrupts his little pity party and says, "Elijah, I want you to get up. Go and anoint the next king of Syria. Anoint the next king of Israel. And anoint Elisha as your successor. And by the way Elijah, I still have 7,000 others in Israel who have remained faithful to me."

You may feel lonely, but you're never alone.

If you're going through a tough time today, I want to remind you of this today: You may feel lonely, but you're never alone.

God has put you in a church family to support you.

But even when your church family lets you down – because we're all human – God Himself is with you.

Jesus is with you constantly by His Spirit.

¹ Word for Today 30-12-07

² Word for Today 14-1-08

³ Brother Lawrence *The Practice of the Presence of God* p 81