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**North Road Chapel (Evangelical)
BIDEFORD**

FORTY MOMENTOUS DAYS

“...lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”
(Matthew 28:20)

In the closing statement of Matthew’s Gospel record, the people of God have the encouragement of being assured of the perpetual presence of Christ. It is sadly possible to think of the Lord only being with His people two thousand years ago, or at best, now resident in Heaven. This conveys a sense of distance and separation which in turn robs the believer of the gracious influence and living power which Christ’s conscious presence affords.

Human bereavement is a very strange experience. When a near and dear relative is lost, the emotions of those who remain are tumultuous and varied. There are occasions when, in thought, their loved-one feels close at hand, and it is difficult to accept that they are really gone – the smiling face, the familiar voice comes so vividly to mind. Then the stark reality returns, accompanied by the indescribable loss and emptiness which that death has caused, with its ongoing sadness. Those who are thus bereaved may be subject to this alternating state of perceived nearness at times, and distance at others. However, in the case of the Lord Jesus, the situation is very different. He was about to leave His own; but before departure assured them that He is neither dead nor distant, and will be with His people at all times, in all places, and in every situation. This is a statement worthy of examination, for it is an exceedingly precious line of truth.

There are two significant expressions in the Lord’s words concerning His presence, which ought to be noted. Firstly, He does not say, “I **will** be with you always”, but rather “**I AM** with you”. Contained in those words is a further testimony to His deity. He

was appearing to His disciples as their risen Saviour and Redeemer, but moreover He must assure them that He is a **Divine** Redeemer, the eternal, self-existing one, with whom there is neither past or future, but one unchanging present – now. It is not simply stated that Christ ‘had been’ present with His people, or that He ‘would be’ at some future time, but “**I AM with you alway**” and that “*even unto the end of the world.*”

This also clearly indicates that the Great Commission given by the Lord at His tenth post-resurrection appearance was not exclusively for the few Apostles who heard it spoken there on the outskirts of Bethany. **They** would not live until ‘the end of the world’. This charge, with its accompanying promises are to all the **true church** right to the end of time. Herein is set forth the divinity of Christ in the “I AM” of His presence, and the preservation and perpetuity of the Church. God will have a remnant on earth, to the very conclusion of human history. The Risen Christ will be with those people. Although they will be found in every part of the world as a result of the spread of the gospel, wheresoever a true believer dwells, in whatever generation, the Lord is **with them**.

The second noteworthy feature of the Saviour’s promise, is the word “*alway*”. It literally means ‘all thy days’, or ‘I am with thee daily’. The original Greek word is full of meaning, and conveys the thought of ‘all kinds of days’. Days of sunshine, days of storm; days when life is pleasant, and days when trouble comes. Even in those darker hours, when anxiety besets, or sickness comes, or bereavement invades the family – “I AM with you daily” says the Lord, “in every eventuality”. He will give peace when all around is turmoil, He bestows light when all around is dark and foreboding, He grants comfort to the broken-hearted, He bears up those who find all other supports give way. And when the believer reaches their very last day upon earth, He is there, underneath are His

everlasting arms to carry them safely home – for He has promised, “I AM with you all your days, even unto the end.”

How, or in what manner, is Christ present with His people? Some might say that it is one and the same with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, who the Lord said would abide with them for ever; but this is to confuse two distinct promises. It is gloriously true that the third person of the Trinity, the blessed Comforter, now dwells in the hearts of all His own – but here in the tenth appearance, the Lord Jesus is speaking personally, and says, “*I am with you*”, announcing His personal presence with His servants, ministers and redeemed ones. This is an unspeakably rich doctrine abounding with comfort.

Daily, the Lord is with His people. Is it a day of corporate worship? He will be in the midst of the two or three who gather for prayer, as well as in the great congregation where numerous voice join to sing God’s praises. Is it at the Lord’s Table, when with a contrite heart and tearful eye, the Lord is remembered in His death? He is there to say to His faithful followers “*Peace be unto you*”, “this is only ‘til I come”, “fear not, for it is the Father’s good pleasure to give you the Kingdom”. Is it in the privacy of the closet where the lonely worshipper enters with burdened heart to pour out their soul to the Father who seeth in secret? The Lord Jesus is attendant upon these intimate devotions. In every experience and situation, Christ is there. This is another wondrous truth pertaining to the Kingdom of God, set forth at the tenth resurrection appearance.

It is a promise which applies equally to the downcast minister as he proclaims the Word of God in a wicked and perverse generation, when (as in Isaiah’s day) there are scarcely any who will believe the report. To such a servant, who may feel the pangs of discouragement, the Lord is nigh, as He was with the Apostle Paul: “*Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much*

people in this city” (Acts 18:9-10). How many faithful ministers through history would have given up, were it not for those four words “*I am with thee*”? But with such a promise burning hot in their heart, no good soldier of Jesus Christ would lay down his armour before finishing his course, and being called home by the Lord. Yes – through all their days of worship and service, the Lord is with His people.

What about days of toil and hardship? Think of this promise within the setting in which it was first spoken, and the few men to whom it was directly given. Think of the magnitude of their task, to carry the Gospel hither and thither, preaching salvation through a man who had been condemned to death as a blasphemer. Who would ever believe such a message? To the Jews it would be an offence, and to the Gentiles – utter foolishness. In fact, to publicly proclaim this as the true Gospel, and the rejected Jesus of Nazareth as the one and only Saviour, was to imperil their very lives. Well might those eleven men shrink from a work so vast and difficult, but with the Commission came the promise. Hence it would not be done in their strength, but by His enabling, for the one who had said “*all power is given unto Me*” then added “*lo I am with you alway*”. This was the assurance given to that little embattled company on Olivet, and this is the secret of the exploits which they achieved in those early days.

That same power and presence is equally needed by all God’s people today – and it is equally afforded by that same timeless promise. In some respects, conditions have advanced tremendously in the intervening twenty centuries – but the hearts of men have not altered. The task of presenting the Gospel, of making disciples and teaching them to observe all things, is as great and difficult today as ever it was in the days of Matthew who recorded these words. The Lord knew it would be so: that is why His promise included the clause of perpetuity. It remains unaltered, valid and applicable to

the very last Christian who will live, for its duration is to the end of the world.

What can be said about days of affliction or restriction when such active service is rendered impossible by persecution or infirmity? Many a child of God has had to spend long years almost cut off by trials of various kinds. Yet this makes no difference to the Lord's promise. He did not bestow His power and presence only to those who stand upon the supposed front-line of the battle. Consider the record of Hebrews chapter eleven which gives a history of God's suffering saints, from those who "*subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousnesses...waxed valiant in fight*" to those who "*wandered about...being destitute, afflicted, tormented* " yet every one is recalled in this Biblical memorial, and not one was forsaken of the Lord.

The Second Epistle to Timothy is believed to be the last letter written by the Apostle Paul, and in it he describes many of his experiences. In several touching utterances he relates his manner of life – the disappointments he encountered, the persecutions and afflictions which he endured, often alone, having none to stand with him, humanly speaking. Finally, as he languished in a Roman prison awaiting an appearance before Nero, he revealed the secret of his unflinching devotion and unflinching courage: "***The Lord stood with me, and strengthened me***" (2 Timothy 4:17). Whether it be in the catacombs of Rome, the crags of the Alps, the plains of France, or glens of Scotland, wherever a follower of Christ has suffered or died a martyr's death, the Risen Lord was by their side. Equally so to the widow, orphan, or bereaved parent; and also to the one suffering bodily pain and affliction. The known presence of Christ has enabled countless thousands to take upon their lips these words: "*I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us*" (Romans 8:18).

In conclusion, what about the believer's last day upon earth, the day of death? Then it is that Christ draws closest of all, for that is the day in which His presence is needed the most. Though this dark valley is ominous and frightening to human nature, yet it ought not to be feared, for there in the midst of its dense darkness will the Saviour be fully revealed in the radiancy of His glory, at the trusting believer's side. As wicked men hurled stones at godly Stephen, and the time of his departure was at hand, amidst the agonising and fatal wounds he was even then sustaining, he looked and beheld his Lord and Master, and calmly said: "*Lord Jesus, receive my spirit...And when he had said this, he fell asleep*" (Acts 7:59-60). Such can be the testimony of every true saint who dies in the Lord, trusting to His promises. As the hymnwriter fitly said:

"His oath, His covenant and His blood
Support me in the 'whelming flood;
When all around my soul gives way,
He then is all my hope and stay."

W. H. Molland (*transcribed by R. J. Steward*)

"Learn thence... that all the faithful ministers of Christ, in what part of the world soever God shall cast their lot, and in what time soever they happen to live, may comfortably expect Christ's gracious presence with their persons, and His blessing upon their endeavours. "*Lo I am with you*", I am always with you, and to the end of the world I will be with you. Thanks be to Christ for the gracious promise of His spiritual and perpetual presence with His ministers to the end of the world. May this promise cause us to gird up the loins of our minds, increase our diligence, zeal and fervour, accounting no labour too great, no service too much, no sufferings too severe, so that we may but finish our course with joy, and fulfil the ministry we are engaged in."

William Burkitt (1650 – 1703)

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS

“...let us observe in these verses the gracious promise with which [the Risen Lord Jesus] closes His words. He says to His disciples, *“I am with you always, even to the end of the world”*. It is impossible to conceive words more comforting, strengthening, cheering and sanctifying than these. Though left alone, like orphan children in a cold, unkind world, the disciples were not to think they were deserted. Their Master would be ever ‘with them’. Though commissioned to do a work as hard as that of Moses when sent to Pharaoh, they were not to be discouraged. Their Master would certainly be ‘with them’. No words could be more suited to the position of those to whom they were first spoken. No words could be imagined more consolatory to believers in every age of the world.

Let all true Christians lay hold on these words and keep them in mind. Christ is ‘with us’ always. Christ is ‘with us’ wherever we go. He came to be ‘Emmanuel, God with us’ when He first came into the world. He declares that He is ever Emmanuel, ‘with us’, when He comes to the end of His earthly ministry and is about to leave the world. He is with us daily to pardon and forgive; with us daily to sanctify and strengthen; with us daily to defend and keep; with us daily to lead and guide; with us in sorrow, and with us in joy; with us in sickness, and with us in health; with us in life, and with us in death; with us in time, and with us in eternity.

What stronger consolation could believers desire than this? Whatever happens, they at least are never completely friendless and alone. Christ is ever with them. They may look at the grave, and say with David, *“though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me”* (Psalm 23:4). They may look forward beyond the grave, and say with Paul, *“we shall ever be with the Lord”* (1 Thessalonians 4:17). He has said it, and He will stand to it, *“I am with you always, even to the end of the world.”* *“I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee”* (Hebrews 13:5). We could ask nothing more. Let us go on believing, and not be afraid. It is everything to be a real Christian. None have such a King, such a Priest, such a constant Companion, and such an unfailing friend, as do the true servants of Jesus Christ.

J. C. Ryle

“Christ in you, the hope of glory”

The Gospel is here described as “*Christ in you, the hope of glory*”. There are two distinct senses in which these words may be taken... I shall open up both.

I. **Christ in you** means Christ embraced by faith as our righteousness and strength; and this is the sure ground upon which we hope for glory. In this sense it appears to be used, “*That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith*” (Ephesians 3:17). When a sinner’s heart is opened by the Holy Spirit, when the beauty and excellence of the Saviour is shown to him, the heart inwardly embraces and cleaves to Christ. Every new discovery of Christ to the soul renews this act of cleaving to the Lord Jesus. Every reproach, every temptation, every fall into sin, every bereavement, makes the soul more really, firmly and fully embrace the Lord Jesus; and so, by continual faith, Christ may be said to dwell in the heart. Christ thus embraced is the hope of glory. The soul that can say ‘Christ is mine’, can also say ‘Glory is mine’; for we need nothing but Christ to shelter us in the judgment day. Can you say that Christ is thus in you the hope of glory? If you have not got Christ, you have no good hope of glory.

II. **Christ formed in the soul by the Spirit** (cf Galatians 4:19). Christ formed in the soul is also the hope of glory, and this I take to be the full meaning of this verse. Likewise, “*Abide in Me and I in you*” (John 15:4), “*I in them and Thou in Me*”, “*And I in them*” (John 17:23, 26). The **mind of Christ** is formed in the soul – “*We have the mind of Christ*” (1 Corinthians 2:16). By the mind I understand the thinking powers of man. Now, every believer has the mind of Christ formed in him. He thinks as Christ does – this is the ‘spirit of a sound mind’ (cf 2 Timothy 1:7). This is being of the same mind as the Lord. I do not mean that a believer has the same

all-seeing mind, the same infallible judgment concerning everything as Christ has; but up to his light, he sees things as Christ does.

He sees **sin** as Christ does. Christ sees sin to be evil and bitter. He sees it to be filthy and abominable – its pleasures all a delusion. He sees it to be awfully dangerous. He sees the inseparable connection between sin and suffering. So does a believer.

He sees the **Gospel** as Christ does. Christ sees amazing glory in the Gospel. The way of salvation which He Himself has wrought out. It appears a most complete salvation to Him – most free – most glorifying to God and happy for man. So does the believer.

He sees the **world** as Christ does. Christ knows what is in man. He looked on this world as vanity, compared with the smile of His Father. Its riches, its honours, its pleasures, appeared not worth a sigh. He saw it passing away. So does the believer.

He sees **time** as Christ did. *“I must work the works of Him that sent Me, while it is day: the night cometh...”* (John 9:4). *“I come quickly”* (Revelation 22:20). Even so does a believer look at time.

He sees **eternity** as Christ does. Christ looked at everything in the light of eternity. *“In My Father’s house are many mansions”* (John 14:2). Everything is valuable in Christ’s eyes only as it bears on eternity. So it is with believers...

But how is that ‘Christ formed in us’ is the hope of glory? ...Christ in the soul is not our title to glory. We must have complete righteousness to be our title; but Christ in the soul is not complete. [We] are sadly deficient in many of the main features of Christ. It is Christ **for** us, laid hold on by faith, that is our title to glory. Christ our wedding garment – the Lord our Righteousness; this and this alone can give us boldness in the day of judgment.

R. M. McCheyne (1843)

Promised Presence

“for He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee”
(Hebrews 13:5)

There is something peculiarly emphatic in the way in which [this motive is introduced]: *“for **He** hath said ”*. It is somewhat similar to – *“We know **Him** that hath said ”* (Hebrews 10:30). It is more emphatic than if it had been put ‘God hath said’. **He** hath said; and His power is omnipotent, and His wisdom unsearchable, and His faithfulness inviolable. **He** *“is not a man that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent: hath He said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?”* (Numbers 23:19). And if **He** be with us – if infinite power be our defence, and infinite wisdom our guide, and infinite love and excellence our portion – what need of covetousness, and what ground of contentment! What would we have more than Divinity with us? What is all the wealth and honour and pleasure of the world, if He is not with us? If He leave us, what matters it what is left behind; and if He does not leave us, what matters it who or what forsake us? Well may we, without anxiety, and with sweet inward satisfaction, pass through floods and fires if He is with us. The one will not drown, the other will not consume us. *“When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee”* (Isaiah 43:2). *“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me”* (Psalm 23:4).

*“So that **we** may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do to me”* (Hebrews 13:6). If **He** has said ‘I will never leave’, we may well say ‘What shall man do?’

John Brown (Edinburgh) 1784 – 1858

CHRIST IN HIS CHURCH

In His parting words to His people upon earth, the incarnate Lord said “*lo, I am with you alway*”. This is one of several occasions on which He gave assurances of His ongoing presence abiding with those that believe in Him. These are “*exceeding great and precious promises*” that every true Christian delights to contemplate, and desires to see fulfilled. Strong consolation and good hope is to be derived from dwelling upon verses like these – for each believer can claim them, personally and practically. But is there any time or place in which the Lord’s presence may be experienced more than another? It is sensible to suppose that if the Lord is nigh unto every saint individually, then He is **especially** present when those saints are themselves assembled together. This fact is borne out in several places, not least by the Lord’s own words: “*For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them*” (Matthew 18:20), and further by His actions during the post-resurrection ministry: “*the first day of the week, when...the disciples were assembled... came Jesus and stood in the midst*” (John 20:19). Yet a still more emphatic demonstration of this principle is to be found in the opening chapter of the Revelation. Here the Apostle John records the Divinely-imparted sights which he was caused to behold: seven golden candlesticks, representative of seven local Churches, “*And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of Man*” (Revelation 1:13).

There follows a wondrous description of the glorified Christ, from head to foot, in graphic, amazing detail – but the candlesticks, typifying the Churches are an essential and inseparable part of that picture. Indeed, they were the first feature of which John became aware, “*And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks*” (v.12). John was granted a unique insight into the spiritual realm, and the situation as it now

pertains, between the Lord's Ascension and His future return. It was the "*Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto His servants*" (v.1) – namely, Christ in His **present** capacity – not seated upon a throne in a final state of eternal honour; not riding upon a white horse executing the judgment of the Last Day; but Christ in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks – the Lord within His own earthly Church.

It is common for Christians to speak of the presence of the Lord Jesus in the gatherings of the Church. In prayer, He is besought to fulfil these very promises, while hymns ask: "Jesus stand among us, in Thy risen power". By faith, believers know that their petitions are graciously answered. But how would the Saviour actually appear, if for an instant faith could become sight, and the veil be drawn momentarily away, and mortal vision glimpse the Lord? Would He stand forth as a humble Galilean, the carpenter's son of Nazareth, having "*no beauty that we should desire Him*" (Isaiah 53:2); and "*His visage...marred more than any man*" (Isaiah 52:14)? Or would His appearance be more like that which the disciples beheld in the Transfiguration, white and glistening, yet all enwrapped in an ineffably bright overshadowing cloud? No, the fact of the matter is given by John. If the Lord could be seen, as He stands in the midst of His Churches today, it would be like this: arrayed in a glorious robe and golden girdle, His countenance shining as the sun, His hair white, His eyes aflame, His flesh as molten brass, His voice like the thundering seas, with stars in His hand, and a sword in His mouth – this description applies now! This is the fashion in which the Lord stands amongst His assembled people! The fact that mortal eyes are holden from the sight does not alter the reality.

"What if Thy form we cannot see,
We know and feel that Thou art here."

This is an awesome doctrine; but such is the truth of the Revelation.

This then, is the nature of the Great Head – and this is His proximity: He “*walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks*” (Revelation 2:1). It is a truth designed to comfort and concern; to impart both rejoicing and rebuke to the soul. For since He is here, He hears all that is said; He sees all that is done; He marks every member, every visitor, every absentee; and He observes not only the outward appearance, but also the heart.

The presence of the Lord is a cause for great comfort and joy, for He has promised “*to beautify the place of My sanctuary; and I will make the place of My feet glorious*” (Isaiah 60:13) – such is the sanctifying effect that Christ has in every Church upon which His foot alights. Think too of the majesty, strength and power which He conveys. None need worry about smallness of their number, for Infinity is here. None need to fear the strength of the foe, with Omnipotence in their midst. None have to doubt if their prayers are heard, while Omniscience is present. Let those who are feeling far from God, or struggling to regain the sense of communion with Him turn in to the Church again, where these things – indeed, where **He** – is to be found. The Psalmist, and many saints since have proved it so: “*as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped...Until I went into the sanctuary of God*”, for it is there that the believer is oftenest caused to testify, “*I am continually with Thee: Thou hast holden me by my right hand*” (Psalm 73:2, 17, 23).

There is much to distress and discourage Christians in these days, when so many voices clamour against the Truth, and numerous forces seem marshalled against them. Here is a fact to dispel all doubt and fear: God the Son is standing in the midst of the candlesticks. In “*the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early. The heathen raged, the kingdoms were*

moved: He uttered His voice, the earth melted. The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge” (Psalm 46:4-7).

The truth of Christ’s presence within each Church is also a matter for serious reflection and self-examination. In the light of it, every occasion of gathering in the Church becomes an unspeakably solemn responsibility and privilege – an audience with the King of Kings. Every attendee should make enquiry of themselves as they enter. Do they come as unto the Risen, glorified Lord – prepared and fitted for communion with Him – in a spirit of contrition, humility and expectancy – with due exercise of heart and mind? No less an attitude will suffice for so important an appointment. For His all-perceiving eyes are “*as a flame of fire*”; “*all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do*” (Hebrews 4:13).

The image of Christ ‘walking’ amongst the candlesticks conveys the sense of His observation and critical examination of them, “*For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him*” (2 Chronicles 16:9). This recalls to mind the parable of that man who planted a fig tree in his vineyard, and came and sought fruit thereon (cf Luke 13:6-9). In a similar way, the Lord has planted each local Church. He has established every candlestick in its respective place, and set a lamp upon it. Now He walks up and down, seeing how they do. Is the lampstand burnished and bright? Is the flame still burning, or is it blown about by every wind of doctrine? Is it smoking with fumes of error, or guttering for want of spiritual fuel? Is the light dim and diminishing? He is close enough to see and know.

The Lord will preserve His light within this dark world. He will not allow it to be completely extinguished and so leave Himself without witness. But no individual local Church may presume upon its own

continuance if declension and sin go unaddressed. Hence the sober warning to the Church at Ephesus: “*Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent*” (Revelation 2:5). This challenge continues to echo from the pages of Scripture to every New Testament assembly. Let the Churches then order and behave themselves as befits the presence of the Heavenly Examiner.

‘This is a hard saying’, and such a prospect might incline the Churches’ members to despair. How can they bear in their midst one so glorious and Divine? How can such a Holy Guest be entertained? How can they possibly live up to His righteous standards? He is lofty, exalted and eternal, while they are mortal men and women beset with sin and all the rigours of this present evil world. Can so great a Head contend and commune with a people so earthly and troubled? Can He possibly understand their difficulties and limitations? Can He have any feeling for their infirmities?

For the further comfort and encouragement of his believing readers, John continues His description of Christ thus: “*one like unto the Son of Man*”. The glorified Lord whom he beheld was seen in the form of a man – not a spirit, having no corporeal body – not taking on the nature of angels – but like unto the sons of men. The Divine personage who stood before John was equipped with eyes, and arms and hands and feet. His physique and proportions were instantly recognisable; He was altogether human in appearance. The fact remains that the second person of the Godhead was born of a woman, and made in the likeness of sinful flesh (cf Galatians 4:4, Romans 8:3). “*For verily He took not on Him the nature of angels; but He took on Him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren*” (Hebrews 2:16-17). And He has never ceased to wear that human form, from His

incarnation, through life and death and resurrection, to this present time, and so on into all eternity. It was a fact that the Lord stressed to the disciples after He rose from the grave: “*Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them...Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself: handle Me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see Me have. And when He had thus spoken, He shewed them His hands and His feet*” (Luke 24:36-40). In that same human body He ascended into Heaven, where that physical frame is honoured, exalted and glorified. Lest any should doubt, the Revelation stands as ultimate proof. He has raised humanity to the heights of Glory.

“Oh joy! There sitteth in our flesh,
Upon a throne of light,
One of a human mother born,
In perfect Godhead bright!”

A consequence of this is that He is perfectly fitted for dealings with the Church. “*it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted*” (Hebrews 2:17-18). He knows all about the difficulties, hardships and weaknesses of the flesh, for He has felt the same. He is perfectly acquainted with the trials and temptations that beset His people, for He has walked along precisely the same road. Yes – the glorified Christ who stands within the Church is the Son of God, resplendent, terrible, Divine, with radiant countenance, fiery eyes, glowing feet – and He is equally the Son of Man, made like His brethren, having head and eyes and feet, having a full and complete empathy with every aspect of the human condition. If one member of the earthly body suffers, all the members suffer with it (cf 1 Corinthians 12:26), but it is the Head who feels it most keenly, and identifies with it more closely.

In the ancient worship of the Tabernacle, it was the special responsibility of the High Priest and his sons to tend and maintain the lamps which stood around its courts (cf. Exodus 27:20-21, 1 Samuel 3:3). So Christ is here to be seen in His High Priestly office. This is further reinforced by the description “*clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle*” (Revelation 1:13). Throughout Scripture, robes are used as a sign of office and authority. Here is depicted a robe extending to the feet – an authority complete and entire. Christ is the sole and final authority to His own Churches. They have no need of Synods or Presbyteries or other man-made intermediates, for Christ is in the midst of His own Churches, with nought to stand between.

This coupling of garment and girdle, or sash, speaks particularly of the priestly authority instituted in Aaron of old. “*And of the blue, and purple, and scarlet, they made cloths of service, to do service in the holy place, and made the holy garments for Aaron; as the Lord commanded Moses...And the curious girdle of his ephod, that was upon it, was of the same, according to the work thereof; of gold, blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen; as the Lord commanded Moses*” (Exodus 39:1, 5). The historian Josephus further confirms: “The High Priest is indeed adorned with the same garments that we have described, without abating one... This also is a long robe, reaching to his feet... and is tied around with a girdle, embroidered with the same colours and flowers as the former, with a mixture of gold interwoven” (Antiquities of the Jews Book 3, Chapter 7).

These vestments, depicted again in the Revelation of Jesus Christ, declare His ongoing work of intercession. For He is the great Daysman, who is both God and man, and thus empowered to mediate between them (cf Job 9:33). “*Such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens*” (Hebrews 7:26). This is He of

whom the Epistle speaks – He is also the central theme of the Revelation. This man, who, *“because He continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them”* (Hebrews 7:24-25).

This majestic, risen, ascended, glorified Christ, is also the Church’s Great High Priest, whose concern is that forgiveness might be procured, and atonement made, and their union with God assured. This work He ceaselessly and unfailingly performs on behalf of all His members. He is present in their midst to intercede in their corporate prayers, to offer their united worship unto God as the sweet-smelling savour of the incense sacrifice, and to graciously attend to the candlesticks among which He continually stands.

“‘Lo, I am with you’ - that sweet word,
Lord Jesus, meekly be it heard;
And stamped with all-inspiring power
On our weak souls this favoured hour.

‘Lo, I am with you’, even so,
Thy joy our strength, we fearless go;
And praise shall crown the suppliant's call,
Head of the Church, and Lord of all!” (J. Tritton)

R. J. Steward

“Let the Church return to Patmos whenever she is assailed by the powers of evil, and let her receive again from John, her brother and companion in tribulation and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, the words of his vision; let her see through his eyes and hear through his ears, faith’s answer to all the power which may come against her, and she must always overcome.”

C. D. Alexander

‘Lo I am with you always’

The Lord Jesus is in the midst of His Church; He walketh among the golden candlesticks; His promise is, *‘lo I am with you always’*. He is as surely with us now as He was with the disciples... Not carnally, but still in real truth. Jesus Christ is with us. And a blessed truth it is, for where Jesus is, love becomes inflamed. Of all the things in the world that can set the heart burning, there is nothing like the presence of the Lord Jesus! A glimpse of Him so overcomes us, that we are ready to say, *“turn away Thine eyes from me, for they have overcome me”*. Even the smell of the aloes and the myrrh, and the cassia, which drop from His perfumed garments, causes the sick and faint to grow strong. Let there be but a moment’s leaning of the head upon that gracious bosom, and a reception of His love into our poor cold hearts, and we are cold no longer, but glow like seraphs, equal to every labour, and capable of every suffering. If we know that the Saviour is with us, every power will be developed, and every grace will be strengthened, and we shall cast ourselves into the Lord’s service with heart, and soul and strength; therefore is the presence of Christ to be desired above all things.

His presence will be the most realised by those who are most like Him. If you desire to see Christ, you must grow in conformity to Him. Bring yourself, by the power of the Spirit into union with Christ’s desires, and motives, and plans of action, and you are likely to be favoured with His company. Remember, His presence may be had. His promise is as true as ever. He delights to be with us. If He doth not come, it is because we hinder Him by our indifference. He will reveal Himself to our earnest prayers, and graciously suffer Himself to be detained by our entreaties and tears, for these are the golden chains which bind the Lord Jesus to His people.

C. H. Spurgeon

Editorial

The wonderful promise of the Lord's perpetual presence with His people is the theme of this edition. It is a subject woven so copiously throughout the New Testament Scriptures that it cannot be overlooked or denied. Yet, in their personal experiences, Christians may often feel the reality of the promise strangely absent; and all the assurances of God's Word notwithstanding, be inclined to complain with Job of old: "*Oh that I knew where I might find Him!*" (Job 23:3). How is a sense of Christ's nearness to be regained? With what meditations may Christians encourage themselves, and thus 'assure their hearts before Him'?

Let any despairing saint, who has grown insensible of the proximity of the Saviour consider this: His Word **cannot** be broken. "*Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away*" (Matthew 24:35) says the Lord, and it is impossible for Him to lie (cf Hebrews 6:18). He has promised "*lo, I am with you always*" – that fact is more sure and certain than the ground beneath the believers' feet; more trustworthy and dependable than all the material creation. Added to which are His Divine attributes of faithfulness and immutability. There can be no codicil to the Lord's will and no disclaimer to His promises. The pledge that He made to His disciples two millennia ago has not diminished or altered one iota in its veracity – nor can it! Then (as the hymnwriter asks): "What more can He say than to you He has said?"

Christians must accept many things on the basis of the Lord's words alone – the nature of Heaven; the certainty of His return and coming judgment; the very principle of salvation itself. Why then should the promise of His continual presence be any harder to receive, or any more difficult to believe? It is as sure as salvation.

There are times of day, and particular seasons of the year, when the sun seems to depart. It cannot be seen with the eye, neither can its light or warmth be felt. An uninstructed observer might be inclined to fear, and conclude that the sun itself had moved from its fixed place in the heavens, and been lost to the globe. But such is not the case. The sun is the fixed centre of the solar system. Any apparent absence is caused, not by movement of that central star, but by the Earth, turning away from the sun – or by earth-born clouds arising to obstruct the view. Were the sun really to have gone – the results would be far more evident and severe, and life would be rendered impossible.

Such is the case with the Lord and His people. He is the eternally unmoving Daystar on high. They may wax and wane in their sense and realisation of Him, but He changeth never. They may know temporary seasons in which the Lord seems far distant, but it is only a passing phase, for He is ever nigh, holding them close to Himself. He says in another place: “*without Me ye can do nothing*” (John 15:5). By this argument, every virtue or grace that a believer possesses, every spiritual fruit that they bear, every act of faith which they manifest – however small or slight – is evidence that Christ abides in them. For in the absence of His empowering and enabling presence, they would have no life or ability at all. Then let the troubled saints who mourn for want of Christ’s presence take heart! Those very same concerns and emotions are themselves proof that the Lord is nigh unto them, causing their souls to yearn for a deeper experience of Himself.

‘I am with thee!’ He hath said it,
In His truth and tender grace;
Sealed the promise grandly spoken,
With how many a mighty token
Of His love and faithfulness!

‘I am with thee!’ With thee always,
All the nights and ‘all the days’;
Never failing, never frowning,
With His loving-kindness crowning
Tuning all thy life to praise.

(F. R. Havergal)