

# Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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## The Promises Jesus - The Promise of His Presence

In the Old Testament a dramatic story is told in Daniel chapter 3 of three men, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, who preferred to put their trust in God rather than worship an idol set up by the great king Nebuchadnezzar. This tremendous image of gold, 90 feet tall, was set up with the command of the monarch that all people of the realm, at certain times, must fall down and worship the image. But these three men believed this to be an affront to their worship of God and would not bow down to the image. The threat was clearly stated; they would be cast into a fiery furnace.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego were brought before Nebuchadnezzar who was enraged with their refusal to comply with his command and ordered that they must be burnt alive in the furnace. 'Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us', they said, 'but if not...we will not serve thy gods', Daniel 3:17-18. Such was the faith of these men that they would prefer to be burnt alive than fail the God in whom they trusted. In his fury Nebuchadnezzar urged, 'heat the fire seven times hotter!' Then he commanded those three men to be thrown into the furnace. As he watched, to his astonishment he said, 'Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? ... Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God', Daniel 3:24-25. What did Nebuchadnezzar know of the 'Son of God'? Quite clearly he had an inner knowledge of God, which all of us have, by which we know of the existence of a God beyond our being and to whom, at times, we must yield honour. Let us never forget that the Lord stands by those who trust in Him.

There is another incident in Exodus 32 to which we can also refer. Moses had only just received the law from God in mount Sinai when he was told to return to the people because of their sin of idolatry. Such was the wrath of God that He was ready to consume them. Oh, the power of the intercession of Moses for the people, a deep intercession by which he was ready even to cut himself out from an eternity with God if necessary, for the sake of the people!

In chapter 33, in spite of the unbelieving people, God directs Moses to lead the people on and an angel would go before them. To Moses this was second best and he comes to God who speaks to him face to face as with a friend. Moses pleads with God, 'If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence', verse 15. God had already said 'My presence shall go with thee', verse 14, and He confirms, 'I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken', verse 17, and God adds, 'I know thee by name'. How important it was to Moses that the presence of God be with him in his responsibility and God confirms that His knowledge of Moses, by name, as fully committed to God, means He would do this thing.

We have taken two instances in the Old Testament to show how the presence of God was of such great value in those times. Let us note, however, that on both of these occasions there was no certainty of the presence of God with His people. In the first, it was anticipated but not relied on, although faith made sure that the three men would never let God down. In the second, Moses was fully convinced that, if the presence of God was not there, he could not go on.

Today we want to consider the wonderful promise the Lord Jesus has made to every believer that He will be present with us. We all experience times of deep darkness, real loneliness, the weariness of old age, the weakness of illness and many other things. Do we desire and claim the promises of God? God spoke to His people, Israel, through Isaiah, 'I have redeemed thee...thou art Mine'. He went on to promise, '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...I am the LORD thy God...thy Saviour', 43:1-3. We can also be sure to claim that promise for ourselves.

In the New Testament we find a different condition to that of the Old Testament. The Lord Jesus speaks on the basis of a tremendous change. His death and resurrection, the union of all believers in 'one body' with Christ as the Head brings in a new situation. The Holy Spirit is promised to *indwell* every believer and the gospel of John chapters 14-16 detail some of these key truths. Also, the Lord Jesus promises His continual presence with His disciples while in this world. Let us look at some Scriptures.

**CERTAINTY OF HIS PRESENCE.** Matthew 28:20

Just before He left this world, Jesus encourages His disciples in the pathway ahead reminding them that 'All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore...' He concludes His encouragement by saying, 'I am with you always, even unto the end of the world' (or age). Matthew 28:18-20. Here, then, is the first statement today. He promises the certainty of His presence, 'I am with you'. It is important, when we find ourselves surrounded by difficulties to claim this promise of His presence for ourselves. Perhaps, sometimes, we do not sense it; later we realise that He has been with us all the time, but let us claim the promise in any case.

Then there is the second part; 'even unto the end of the age'. As long as time goes on, and the Lord Jesus has not come for His own, His promise is a guarantee of His presence all the way to the end. There is never a time when He will leave any believer without His support. Sometimes we grieve Him by our actions or sin. He cannot then easily act and we may not sense His presence until we put matters right with Him. But the promise is still there! Claim it in times of need and you will find His comfort surrounding you.

We find an example in Acts 23. Paul was in Jerusalem and was challenged concerning his understanding of the responsibility new believers had to the law. Through this turmoil he was taken before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish religious Council, and even here there was further confusion, so much so that the Roman captain had to come and bring him by force into the castle for safety. We can imagine Paul was feeling very dejected but it is recorded, 'And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome', verse 11. What **confirmation** this brought to the apostle!

Again, in chapter 27, just before the shipwreck, Paul came to the ship's company and said, 'There stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying, Fear not...sirs, be of good cheer; for I believe God'. 23-25. Immeasurable **comfort** claimed the heart of the apostle! Jesus' presence with us brings support in every situation so that we may not doubt.

**CONDITIONS OF HIS PRESENCE.**

Next we turn to the gospel of John 14:23. In this we find there are conditions set out for the presence, not only of the Lord Jesus, the Son, but also the presence of the Father. 'Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love Me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him'. The disciples had great difficulty in understanding the Lord's teaching and this statement was in reply to a question by one of the disciples. Let us grasp the real meaning.

The first condition is that of love. In the next verse the Lord shows that the individual who does not love is not in the habit of keeping the Word of God. The unbelieving person is not capable of this love for he knows nothing of the love of the Lord in his life. Love for the Lord is a necessity, for so doing we will be ready to keep, not only His words, but more accurately, the whole of the Word.

The second condition is, therefore, keeping His Word. How easy it is to slip into excusing ourselves from keeping some part of the Word of God perhaps on the basis that it does not apply to us. Sometimes we hear that we have moved on from the time when the Word of God was written; times have changed and it excuses us from some simple desire the Lord has for us. Sadly, where there is disobedience, it is often due to a lack of love in the heart, not only for the Lord Jesus, but the word of the Father, who sent Him, is also slighted.

When these conditions are fulfilled, then we have the tremendous promise that both Father and Son will 'make their abode' with us. The whole Godhead, Father, Son, Holy Spirit, therefore, are united with the believer today. The disciples saw the Lord but it did not last. The Godhead making their abode with us, this living continual presence, means much more.

**COMING TOGETHER IN HIS PRESENCE**

It is clear from all we have been considering that, even for believers in the Lord Jesus, there are times when we need to sense His presence with us, perhaps because of difficulties or trials we are going through. In Matthew 18 the Lord is teaching His disciples concerning discipline in the Christian company. This leads to a wonderful nugget of the Lord's teaching in verse 20. 'For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them'. The qualification for this assurance is 'in My name' and the Lord graciously reminds us that He is in the midst. When the Church of Christ comes together is it in His name, with His full authority and with dependence on Him? If so, He *is* there to lead and guide! When the Church comes together to worship the Lord it is a happy thing to know that the Lord Jesus has said, 'I am in the midst'. With that knowledge our hearts should be better tuned to praise. Sadly, the apostle Paul had to tell the Corinthians 'when ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's Supper. For in eating every one taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is

drunken...I praise you not', 1 Corinthians 11:20-22. So, whatever they thought they were doing, it was certainly not in happy fellowship with acting in His name. It is so necessary, when we come together, that it be in a way that will be honouring to the Lord and in dependence upon His Word.

### CONTENTMENT WITH HIS PRESENCE

So often we may look around us and see others, we think, doing so much better than ourselves. How can this be when we think, 'they are not even believers'. Asaph, the psalmist, could not understand why it was that wicked people seemed to be so successful, Psalm 73. However he did find the answer to his concerns. He writes: 'When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me, until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end', verse 16-17. Perhaps we all feel these things sometimes and we wish we had more. Yet we have another promise of the Lord in Hebrews 13:5-6. Let me read it. 'Let your conversation (or, the way in which you conduct your life) be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for He hath said, *I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee*. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me'. What a promise of His presence with us!

1. We can be content because the Lord is with us - 'I will never leave thee'. What permanence His assurance brings! This tremendous statement provides all the security we need in this world. To His disciples the Lord said, 'I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand', John 10:28. In case there is any doubt He adds, 'no man is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand', verse 29. Not one wicked person has this assurance.
2. We can be content because, in any problem, He is our helper. We have no greater helper than the One who has saved us from the punishment due for our sin.
3. We can be content because the promise says 'never'. This means that no reason will arise for the Lord to give us up and let us go. The verse also says 'nor forsake', that is, He will not leave us in the lurch, just at the point when we need His presence most. The Lord Jesus says, 'Consider the lilies how they grow... Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these... how much more will He clothe you, O ye of little faith', Luke 12:27 and 28. Your Father knows your needs, He will supply. We do not need the possessions or pleasures of unbelieving men and women when we have such a Lord. Let us rely on His promises!
4. We can be content because we know the love of Christ. Listen to the apostle Paul: 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord', Romans 8:35-39. The love that brought our Saviour to die for us unites us to Him continually.

### THE COMFORT OF ETERNITY IN HIS PRESENCE

We cannot leave our subject today without referring to 1 Thessalonians 4:17. Paul tells us, 'so shall we ever be with the Lord'. The Thessalonian Christians must have been startled to read this letter and glad to have the whole subject clarified by Paul. Some had already died. Had they missed out on the coming of Christ? How could they have a part? So the apostle explains just what will happen in very clear terms. We can see from these verses 13-18 all that is involved.

1. Every true believer, whether asleep or still alive in this world, is assured of being 'with the Lord'. Not one will be missing!
2. 'The Lord Himself', not an angel, not even an archangel alone, not the great apostle Paul, but He who has loved us with an everlasting love, will come for all who belong to Him. As the Lord, He is in total control. No one can prevent Him in this action. There is no doubt!
3. He comes with a shout, assembling every one. Just as soldiers, standing at ease on the parade ground, are called to attention, so will every believer at the precise moment of His coming.
4. He is accompanied by the archangel. It seems that the role of an archangel is to support the Church. What great support the Lord chooses for His coming.
5. He comes with the sound of the trumpet of God. The trumpet was used in the Old Testament as a signal for all to start from camp. My friend, are you ready? Then take comfort in this promise. At His coming, to call us to eternity, you will gladly hear that trumpet call to move away.

6. He comes 'in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye', 1 Corinthians 15:52. We shall be caught up, we shall be snatched away with tremendous speed. Whatever we are doing at that moment will be interrupted and we shall be gone!
7. He comes to unite us with Himself in the clouds. We shall see Him, no longer with those eyes of faith with which we are blessed now, but with our perfect eyesight and face to face! We shall be with our Saviour forever. Let us comfort one another with the promise of His presence for evermore.

What promises of the presence of the Lord we have spoken of today. If there has been difficulty, if there has been doubt, claim these promises for yourself now. Make them your own. Live in the strength of what the Lord has promised and He will encourage you in your Christian experience now and each day until He calls you to Himself.

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