

THE COMFORT OF AN EVERPRESENT GOD MATT. 28:19,20

LIFE VERSE OF DAVID LIVINGSTONE

It is the word of a gentleman of the most strict and sacred honor, so there's the end of it. So said David Livingstone to himself as he placed his finger on the verse in the Bible on which he had staked his entire life.

He was surrounded by hostile and infuriated savages. During the 16 years that he had spent in Africa to this point, he had never been in such imminent danger. Death literally was staring him in the face. He was strongly tempted to sneak out under the cover of darkness and run for his life.

But then he turned in the Bible to this his favorite verse, the words of the Lord Jesus Christ himself just before his ascension back into heaven, *And Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.* It is this verse that gave him strength and courage to resist the temptation to flee and face the dangers headon the next day. But let me quote his own words from his journal written on that very night when he was surrounded by hostile savages. And I quote:

*January 14, 1856. Evening. *Felt much turmoil of spirit in prospect of having all my plans for the welfare of this great region and this teeming*

population knocked on the head by savages tomorrow. But I read that Jesus said: "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore and teach all nations, and (underlined) lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world . It is the word of a gentleman of the most strict and sacred honor, so there's the end of it. I will not cross furtively tonight as I had intended. Should such a man as I flee? Nay, verily, I shall take observations for latitude and longitude tonight, though they may be the last. I feel quite calm now, thank God.

Later that very same year, David Livingstone paid his first visit back to his homeland in Scotland where he served as a missionary under the London Missionary Society. He was the object of attention and adulation everywhere he went. Honors were heaped upon him. The University of Glasgow conferred upon him the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws. On such occasions, it is customary for the students to be quite rambunctious with their applause when the one honored comes to the podium to receive his degree. But when Livingstone's name was announced and when he rose to walk to the podium, a hushed silence descended upon the entire crowd. He betrayed his great struggles and sufferings born in darkest Africa as he slowly moved

towards the pulpit. He was gaunt and haggard as a result of long periods of exposure to the tropical sun. On nearly 30 separate occasions he had been laid low by the severe fevers that steam from the inland swamps, and these illnesses left their mark on his appearance. His left arm which was crushed by a lion's attack hung limp to his side. The great assembly listened in a hushed trance as he quietly announced his resolve to return to that land that had already taken so much from him. But he concluded his brief remarks with the words, *But I return without misgiving and with great gladness. For would you like me to tell you what supported me through all the years of exile among people whose language I could not understand, and whose attitude towards me was always uncertain and often hostile? It was this: Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."* On these words I have staked everything, and they never failed.

We don't know when David Livingstone made this verse which records some of the last words of our savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, his life verse, but it evidently was quite early in his life. But we do know from his own words recorded over and over again in his journal that this verse gave great strength and courage to him throughout his life.

If ever a man needed a companion, David Livingstone did. His calling was to live one of the most lonely lives in human history. Far away from his homeland, spending most of his life trekking through uncharted jungles in the heart of Africa, without family support, his wife dying at a young age, there were many times when he only had the divine companionship of the Lord. But it was enough for him.

We would like to look at this great promise of the Lord Jesus Christ that is recorded in the concluding verses of the gospel of Matthew. And as we meditate briefly this morning on this favorite passage of David Livingstone, I would direct your attention to 3 observations which can be made from it.

1. The first is quite obvious. The Lord Jesus Christ promised in this passage to be with his disciples always. There would never be a time when they would be left alone.

Now this was certainly an important promise for them in the historical situation which they were in. These 11 followers of the Lord Jesus Christ had left all other sources of security to walk with him through life.

*They had left their family behind. And in a day when there wasn't much mobility and when one's security was often placed in the family and the

family business, this represented a great sacrifice.

*They had also left their livelihood's behind. And some of these careers were quite lucrative. Matthew had been a tax collector - one of the higher financial classes. Peter, Andrew, James and John had been fishermen. Their family businesses had been quite large, employing several boats. Again, this was a very respected business in these days. But all of these men had left these careers behind to follow the one who had claimed to be God's Messiah.

*And as long as Jesus was walking with them, their needs had been met. Jesus had somehow provided for all of their physical necessities. A group of wealthy women had been burdened in heart to supply financial resources for the group. Friends like Mary, Martha and Lazarus had always been more than hospitable to them. Jesus had even performed miracles at times when they needed food or money to pay taxes.

*But now, Jesus was leaving them. Soon he would be ascending back into heaven and they would never see him again. What were they going to do now?

*In the midst of their uncertainty and insecurity, the Lord Jesus Christ assures them of his continued presence with them. He would soon be

sending the Comforter, the 3rd person of the triune Godhead, who would indwell each of them throughout their entire lifetime. They would actually be in a more secure position after he left than they were before. For even though Christ's physical presence had been with them during these past 3 years, there were times when he was gone and they were on their own.

*There were times when he would steal away in the night up into a mountain to pray and they would awake in the morning and find the Lord Jesus gone.

*There were times when they even out in a boat, crossing the Sea of Galilee in a storm, and Jesus was not with them.

*And there was that most recent time when Christ was taken from their midst in the Garden of Gethsemane by powerful soldiers and they were left to flee for their lives all on their own.

*But now, the Lord would be with them always. He would never leave nor forsake them. What comfort that would bring to their hearts.

*Christians who have grown to maintain a consistent walk with God have learned the truth that God is always with them. Dr. John Baillie was a theology teacher at the famous University of Edinburgh. He always began

his course of studying God with the same opening paragraph. *Students, we must remember that in discussing God we cannot talk about Him without his hearing every word we say. We may be able to talk to our fellows, as it were, behind their backs, but God is everywhere, yes, even in this classroom. Therefore, in all of our discussions we must be aware of His infinite presence and talk about Him, as it were, before His face.*

*It brings both great comfort and a sober serious to life when we realize the truth of Christ's promise - Lo, I am with you always.

2. But let's move now to a second observation. The Lord Jesus Christ promised to be with his disciples wherever they went. He continues - *even to the end of the world.*

*This was a truth that gave great confidence to David Livingstone. No matter how far he journeyed into remote and uncharted jungles, he could never out-travel God. God always would be with him.

*It was also an important truth for Christ's disciples to understand. Just after the Lord Jesus uttered this words, he would be ascending back into heaven. A few weeks later on the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit would descend upon these disciples in fulfillment to this promise and the church

would be born. The disciples would remain in Jerusalem for a while, but then persecution would begin to scatter them throughout the world. And throughout the world they would go. Peter would end his life in Rome. John would be exiled to the Island called Patmos. Andrew would carry the gospel into Greece. Philip and Bartholomew would journey together into the far regions of Asia spreading the good news of Christ's truths. Matthew would journey down into Ethiopia where he would start many churches. Thomas would end up being called the Apostle of India. Thaddaeus would center his outreach ministry in Persia. Simon the Zealot would carry the gospel as far as Great Britain. Together they would go into the most remote parts of the world known in their day. At times, they must have felt all alone and deserted by human companions. Certainly, the Apostle John felt alone after being exiled on the Isle of Patmos -this was the intent of his punishment by the Roman authorities. But lest they lose heart, the Lord Jesus Christ gave to them this promise before He left them. That no matter where God's will might take them, no matter how remote their physical conditions might be, He would always be there with them - even unto the end of the world.

*We don't face the same kinds of isolation today that the Apostles or

David Livingstone faced. Even missionaries that travel to foreign lands usually find large cities awaiting them. But there are situations that we face in life that make us feel like we have been abandoned in the wilderness. It is generally more easy for us to feel like God's presence is with us when we are in good health and life is going our way than when are told we have to have that operation or we lose our job or our family seems like it is falling apart. But whatever our feelings, the promise that the Lord Jesus Christ gave remains true - He would be with us always, even to the end of the world. He would never leave us nor forsake us. And we can never outrun his presence. We can't journey anywhere on this earth where we can outdistance his presence, and we can't find ourselves in any life situation where He is not right there with us.

One of the most infamous agnostic philosophers in 17th century England was a man named Anthony Collins. He wrote a book that was very well known in his day entitled, *Discourse on Free thinking*. Collins prided himself in his intellectual prowess. One Sunday morning, as he was walking down the street, he met a man who was obviously on his way to church. Collins could tell from his appearance that this man was probably a blue-

collar worker. Thinking that he would have some fun with this man's mind, Collins asked him where he was going. *I am going to church, sir*, came the immediate answer. *Is your God a great God or a little God?*, Collins continued thinking to lure the man into an intellectual debate. But the Christian gave the perfect response, *My God is so great that the heaven of heavens cannot contain him, and so little that He dwells in my heart*. Later in his life, Anthony Collins would admit that this simple answer had made a profound affect on his mind.

People historically have tended to go to one of 2 extremes in their natural views of God. God either is viewed as so great and transcendent that there is no possibility of any contact or relationship with him, or He is viewed as a rather weak and anemic being who is totally at the whim of human will and manipulation.

The Christian who knows God personally knows a being who is at the same time the infinite creator and sustainer of the entire universe and also is a being who is so personally accessible that He dwells within the life of everyone of his children. Jesus Christ was the creator of the universe. The Apostle Paul tells us that by Him all things were created (Col. 1:16). Yet He

promised to be with his followers always, even to the end of the world. He promised never to leave them nor forsake them. And as David Livingstone put it, these were the words of a gentleman of the most strict and sacred honor. Livingstone realized the implications of God making a promise. When God made a promise, His very reputation and character were behind that promise.

3. But there is 3rd observation that we must never forget. This promise given by the Lord Jesus was given in the context of a command to evangelize the world.

*This passage at the end of Matthew is often called the *Great Commission*. It is in this passage that the Lord Jesus passes on his followers the task of carrying the gospel message to the ends of the earth.

*He begins this paragraph by reminding them that all authority in heaven and earth had been given to him. And then he goes on to pass on that authority to his followers by commanding them to go forth and make disciples of all nations. They were to do this by sharing the gospel message that the Lord Jesus had revealed to them, leading converts in a public identification with the Lord Jesus Christ through the waters of baptism, and

then teaching them, instructing them in all the ways of righteousness that the Lord Jesus had shared with them.

*The task that Jesus was giving to them was an enormous and impossible one - if attempted in their own strength. I mean, these disciples had just fled from Christ's side when a few Roman soldiers had come into the Garden of Gethsemane to arrest him. How could they possibly now fulfill this unprecedented task? And certainly, if they had to obey Christ's commandment in their own strength, they would be doomed to failure. But such was not to be the case. Just as all authority had been given to the Lord Jesus Christ, so he was now not only passing on that authority to them, but he was also promising that he would be with them to give strength and wisdom and direction in the fulfillment of this momentous task. And each of these original disciples in turn would realize the power and truth contained in this promise of the Lord Jesus Christ. And each in time would go forth fulfilling this great commission.

*David Livingstone also realized the truth and power of Christ's statement. Livingstone had 3 great goals in life. First, he had a burden to preach the gospel in the remotest parts of Africa. Second, he had a driving

desire to track the 3 great rivers, the Nile, the Congo and the Zambesi which each emptied into a different ocean, thinking that finding their sources would unlock the keys to the African Continent. Third, he desired to uncover those hideous slave trails that were strewn with human skeletons with the goal of stopping the slave trade. Evangelization, Exploration and Emancipation - these were the 3 consuming passions of Livingstone's life - in that order. And those passions necessarily took him into the remotest of all earthly regions. But he never forgot that he did not journey into these regions alone. The Lord Jesus Christ was with him in the person and work of the Holy Spirit. It was his knowledge of this truth that gave courage and strength to him to press on.

*One of the best known anecdotes from Livingstone's life happened after he had dropped out of sight for a very lengthy period of time. Not having heard any communication from him for several years, most were assuming that he had died. It was the New York Herald paper that sent a reporter named H.M. Stanley to try to locate the famous missionary. Stanley caught up with Livingstone at Ujiji in November of 1871 and introduced himself with that now famous greeting, *Dr. Livingstone, I presume*. Stanley

then tried to persuade David Livingstone to return back to civilization with him, but the dedicated missionary convinced Stanley of the mission that he still had to accomplish. Stanley became a Christian and returned back to our country. When asked what influenced him to the Christian faith, without hesitation he answered, *The godly life of David Livingstone*. Stanley had met a man who was fully dedicated to the Lord and it made a great impact upon him.

So the promise of the Lord Jesus Christ, *Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world*, gives assurance to us that there never will be a time when the Christian is without the presence of Christ and there can never be a place on the earth where the believer can go to outdistance the presence of Christ. And this promise gives great confidence and motivation in the proclamation of the gospel of Christ.

I conclude this morning with the concluding scene from the life of David Livingstone. He was now 60 years old. He was away up among the bogs and marshes near Chitambo's village in Ilala. Except for his national helpers, he is all alone. He has walked in life as long as he could walk; and now his feet are so deformed and ulcerated that he is carried on a litter. A

drizzling rain is falling, and he is suffering from a one of the many severe fevers that he has endured. But this one is most serious. His national companions realize the severity of it and schedule shifts to watch the great missionary statesman as he attempts to sleep through the night. The national who was on shift to watch has drifted off into sleep as the long night carries on. He jerks awake and looks to find Livingstone's bed empty. Jumping up with a start, he sees David Livingstone on his knees besides his bed. Livingstone has obviously passed on into his eternal state. But he obviously did so on his knees, in prayer. The Lord who had promised to be with him always, even to the end of the earth, had fulfilled that promise, communing with him even during those final moments of his life. For while some might pity a man of such great character who apparently died all by himself out in the marshes of Africa, David Livingstone really didn't die alone. He died in communication with the One who promised never to leave nor forsake him.

Do you have confidence in a relationship with a God who is always with you this morning? Do you have a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ? If you know the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal savior, you can rest in his promise - *Lo, I will be with you alway, even unto the end of the*

earth.