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## **“THE LORD IS WITH YOU” MEANING AND IMPLICATIONS (2)**

### **Introduction**

In this message we seek to deepen our understanding of the concept of “God is with us” and how it can be applied to our lives, taking heed of various scriptural warnings to work out this area meaningfully.

What does it mean when we pray for God to be with us? Why do we have to pray for God to be with us? Isn't the omnipresent, loving God always with us? Hasn't the Lord Jesus sent the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, to be with us forever?

It is true that God is always with us – in a general sense. God was with the Israelites in the wilderness. He cared for them and provided them water and manna. Yet, He also judged them for their lack of faith and made them wander around in the wilderness till all who were disobedient perished. Should we be satisfied with this kind of relationship with God, with God being with us in the general sense?

### **God's enhanced presence**

God wants to be with us not just in the general sense, but in an enhanced sense. In Matthew 18:20, the Lord Jesus says: “For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst”. “In My name” means being identified with His heart, His character, His concerns. It also means being submitted to His lordship. When we are identified with the Lord in this way, His enhanced presence will be with us. The Lord Jesus makes a similar promise in the last chapter of Matthew.

#### **Matthew 28:18-20**

18 And Jesus came up 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, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,

20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

In verse 20, the Lord Jesus promises His disciples: “I am with you always”. This promise is in the context of obedience to His command to make disciples and to teach them to observe all His commandments. When we are obedient to His

teachings and instructions, He will be with us and will enable us to fulfil all that He has entrusted to us. This is indeed reassuring.

### **Conduct displeasing to God and whether He is with us in a specific matter**

But what if we are involved in things that displease the Lord? Will He be with us then? The answer can be yes and no at the same time. He is with us in the general sense but He may not be with us in the matter or situation as He is not pleased with us. Consider what happened to the Israelites in Numbers 14.

#### **Numbers 14:41-44**

41 ..."Why then are you transgressing the commandment of the Lord, when it will not succeed?

42 "Do not go up, or you will be struck down before your enemies, for the Lord is not among you.

43 "For the Amalekites and the Canaanites will be there in front of you, and you will fall by the sword, inasmuch as you have turned back from following the Lord. And the Lord will not be with you."

44 But they went up heedlessly to the ridge of the hill country; neither the ark of the covenant of the Lord nor Moses left the camp.

The Israelites had been unfaithful to God. As a result, God pronounced judgement on them and barred them from entering the Promised Land. Moses warned the Israelites not to attempt to enter Canaan, saying: "the Lord is not among you"; "the Lord will not be with you". God was not with them in what they had sought to do. Yet, the people insisted on going into the hill country. But without the Lord's help, they could not achieve their objectives and were soundly defeated by the Amalekites and the Canaanites.

Earlier, Joshua and Caleb had this message for the people:

#### **Numbers 14:9**

"Only do not rebel against the Lord; and do not fear the people of the land, for they will be our prey. Their protection has been removed from them, and the Lord is with us; do not fear them."

God had promised the people the land. If they had been obedient to God, they would have been able to enter in, for the Lord would be with them, and He would bring them into the land flowing with milk and honey. So we see that our attitude and conduct will affect whether or not God will be with us in a specific matter or situation.

### **Mixed motives**

Sometimes it may not be appropriate to say unequivocally that God is with us or not with us in a specific situation or matter because of the presence of mixed motives in our hearts and God is not fully pleased with our conduct and the approach taken.

Consider, for example, a context where healing and speaking in tongues and other spiritual manifestations are emphasised. The atmosphere is emotionally charged, with believers longing for dramatic supernatural manifestations. Such longings can arise from a positive desire for spiritual reality and for God's power in service. At the same time, there may be the presence of fleshly desires for excitement, power and recognition, driven by pride in their hearts.

Some condemn such spiritual experiences as fleshly or of the evil one. Others are awed by the display of supernatural power and see it as evidence of God working mightily in their midst.

In reality, both conclusions may be inadequate and inaccurate. God may be at work to some degree, so too the powers of darkness. When we assume that all supernatural occurrences are of God and open our hearts to them, we may come under serious deception and bondage to the powers of darkness. It is therefore important that we are vigilant against being led astray.

### **Beware of being presumptuous that "God is with us"**

When we disobey God in a specific situation, we know, in one sense, God is not with us in that situation. But in another sense, we can say that God is still with us – if He is at work in our hearts, exhorting, rebuking and disciplining us, His children.

The quality and meaning of God being with us can vary a lot, depending on the quality of our walk with Him.

It is possible to be presumptuous about God being with us. Let us consider some passages in the Bible that deal with this subject.

#### **Numbers 14:22-23**

22 "Surely all the men who have seen My glory and My signs which I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have put Me to the test these ten times and have not listened to My voice,

23 shall by no means see the land which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who spurned Me see it.

#### **Numbers 14:28-30**

28 "Say to them, 'As I live,' says the Lord, 'just as you have spoken in My hearing, so I will surely do to you;

29 your corpses will fall in this wilderness, even all your numbered men, according to your complete number from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against Me.

30 'Surely you shall not come into the land in which I swore to settle you, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun.

The Israelites had presumed that God would be with them even when they rebelled against Him. They had seen God's glory and His miracles. Yet, they tested God time and again, and did not listen to His voice. Because of their persistent disobedience, God left them to wander aimlessly in the wilderness. They were excluded from having a meaningful part in the outworking of God's purposes and could not enter the land that God had promised to give them – except for Caleb and Joshua who were faithful to Him.

Paul urges us to learn from what happened to the Israelites.

**1 Corinthians 10:1-6**

1 For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea;  
 2 and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea;  
 3 and all ate the same spiritual food;  
 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ.  
 5 Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness.  
 6 Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved.

**1 Corinthians 10:9-13**

9 Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents.  
 10 Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer.  
 11 Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.  
 12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.  
 13 No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.

We must beware of being over-confident, thinking we are strong and will not fall. Yet, we need not be anxious and fearful when we encounter testing and temptations, as the God we trust is faithful. He will not allow the difficulties to be beyond our ability to cope. If we walk with Him, He will enable us to go through them.

Referring to the wandering in the wilderness, the writer to the Hebrews sounds this warning:

**Hebrews 3:7-8**

7 Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says,

"Today if you hear His voice,  
8 Do not harden your hearts as when they provoked Me,  
As in the day of trial in the wilderness,

**Hebrews 3:12**

Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God.

Let us learn from the mistakes of the Israelites and ensure that our hearts are not evil or unbelieving. It is dangerous to trifle with the grace of God and His assurances to us. It is false comfort to think God is still with us while we live lives that are displeasing to Him. Life would be meaningless if we degenerate and become like the Israelites, wandering aimlessly in the wilderness. We would not have a meaningful part in the fulfilment of God's purposes. On top of that, we have to give an account to Him, the righteous Judge.

**2 Corinthians 5:10**

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

Many believers may be clear about the inheritance that is reserved for them (1 Pet. 1:4), but may not be so conscious of the judgement they would have to face. But Paul tells us clearly in this verse that "we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ" to give an account to the Lord for our deeds – both the sinful, fleshly deeds and the good deeds.

This is a serious matter that we should soberly ponder over. Carelessness in this area can lead to dire consequences. The Scriptures has much to say about this.

**Beware of persistent rebellion and false sense of assurance**

2 Chronicles 36 speaks of God's dealings with the unfaithful officials, priests and Israelites who defiled the house of God.

**2 Chronicles 36:15-16**

15 The Lord, the God of their fathers, sent word to them again and again by His messengers, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place;  
16 but they continually mocked the messengers of God, despised His words and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, until there was no remedy.

Because the Lord loved His people and had compassion on them, He repeatedly warned His people to repent. But they rejected His messengers and continued in

their stubbornness. Finally the wrath of God came upon them. He judged them severely as a nation, sending them into exile.

The Israelites had a false sense of assurance. They thought the land that God had promised them would always be theirs. The prophet Jeremiah warned the Israelites about their false sense of assurance:

**Jeremiah 7:3-15**

3 Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, "Amend your ways and your deeds, and I will let you dwell in this place."

4 "Do not trust in deceptive words, saying, 'This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord.'

5 "For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly practice justice between a man and his neighbor,

6 if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place, nor walk after other gods to your own ruin,

7 then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever.

8 "Behold, you are trusting in deceptive words to no avail.

9 "Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery and swear falsely, and offer sacrifices to Baal and walk after other gods that you have not known,

10 then come and stand before Me in this house, which is called by My name, and say, 'We are delivered!'—that you may do all these abominations?

11 "Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of robbers in your sight? Behold, I, even I, have seen it," declares the Lord.

12 "But go now to My place which was in Shiloh, where I made My name dwell at the first, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of My people Israel.

13 "And now, because you have done all these things," declares the Lord, "and I spoke to you, rising up early and speaking, but you did not hear, and I called you but you did not answer,

14 therefore, I will do to the house which is called by My name, in which you trust, and to the place which I gave you and your fathers, as I did to Shiloh.

15 "I will cast you out of My sight, as I have cast out all your brothers, all the offspring of Ephraim.

The expression "this is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord" in verse 4 reflects the false sense of assurance of the Israelites. They thought God would never allow His temple to be destroyed because God dwells in it. They thought that since God had promised them the land, it would be theirs unconditionally.

But God said that if they truly amend their ways and deeds, practise justice, turn away from evil and do what is good and kind, He would let them dwell in the land. Otherwise He would deal with them the same way He dealt with Shiloh.

Many assurances and promises of God in the Scriptures are conditional upon our walking with God. Many believers mistakenly presume that all the promises of God are theirs unconditionally. There are serious consequences to this presumption, as Proverbs 29:1 warns us.

**Proverbs 29:1**

A man who hardens his neck after much reproof  
Will suddenly be broken beyond remedy.

**Beware of drifting away from the Lord**

The words of the Lord Jesus to the seven churches in Revelation are especially relevant to us who are living in the last days and preparing for the coming again of the Lord Jesus. Let us consider His words to the church in Laodicea.

**Revelation 3:16-17**

16 'So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.

17 'Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked,

Like God's people in Laodicea, we may be lured by the things of the world, drift away from God and become complacent, yet think we are doing fine. In reality, we may be wretched, miserable, poor and blind, and the Lord Jesus sends this warning: "I will spit you out of My mouth". Let us heed His call to repent (vs. 18-19).

The apostle Peter gives a very severe warning:

**2 Peter 2:20-22**

20 For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first.

21 For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them.

22 It has happened to them according to the true proverb, "A dog returns to its own vomit," and, "A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire."

In Hebrews 6:4-5, the author speaks about those who have once been enlightened, tasted of the heavenly gift, and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit. They have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come and then have fallen away. The next three verses elaborate on their plight:

**Hebrews 6:6-8**

6 ...it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.

7 For ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God;

8 but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned.

While God is a God of love and patience, He is also a God of holiness and a consuming fire. Let us therefore take heed. Do not become presumptuous, nor persist in rebellion, nor live with a false sense of security. God's precious and abundant assurances of His presence and protection are for those who love Him and walk with Him. They are not meant for those who turn away from Him and who live a life of selfishness and fleshly indulgence.

Those who love God may still experience weaknesses, failures, difficulties and opposition. We may falter and stumble at times. But as long as there is a contrite spirit and a genuine desire to follow God, we may rest on His assurances and promises that He will watch over us and help us.

**Meaning of "the Lord is with you"**

How then should we respond to God and work out our lives meaningfully in relation to God being with us?

Let me first summarise the three broad senses of "the Lord is with you", the first two of which I have covered in the previous message, and the third, in this message.

The first sense is that of God taking a special interest in a person's life, of God being with him, watching over him, and seeking to mould and transform him, and helping him to fulfil God's purposes for and through his life. We ought to be deeply thankful to God that He takes such an interest in the life of everyone and especially every child of His. However, this does not mean that He is pleased with our lives. If we persist in disobeying Him, the outcome would be negative.

The second sense is that of God's favour coming upon a person because of his positive response. It means that God is pleased with this person and He approves of the person's life.

The third sense is that of God being with us in a particular matter or situation. For there to be a proper sense of assurance that this will always be true, we have to ensure that the second sense is true of our lives to a high degree – that there is deep fellowship with God generally and a deep sense of identification with Him and His purposes. When this is true, and we are careful to maintain a close walk with God at all times, we can have the assurance that He will be with us in every specific matter or situation. God is looking for those whose hearts are completely His and He strongly supports them. Let us seek to attain to this kind of deep fellowship and walk with God. This is the will of God for all His children and it brings great joy to God that He can be with us in this manner at all times.

### **Proper approach and response**

Some may think that the obvious thing to do if we want God to be with us is to pray and cry out to God to be with us. Some believers often do this. They pray and cry out to God to be with them, either generally or in specific situations and over specific matters. But if God is displeased with their lives or disapproves of the things they are involved in, such praying will be neither effective nor meaningful.

When we ask God to be with us, we must first consecrate ourselves to Him and align ourselves with His will and purposes. Only then can we pray to God to bless, guide and enable in the matter at hand and to be with us at all times in the third sense. Only then can we continually have His approval and support. "The Lord is with you when you are with Him" (2 Chron. 15:2). This is the true meaning of dependence on God. It is asking God to enable us to accomplish His work, that His will may be fulfilled. But if we do not consecrate our lives to Him and do not truly seek His will, when we ask God to bless and guide, we are in fact asking Him to bless our own desires, goals and plans. This is not true faith and dependence on God.

An incident recorded in Joshua 5 illustrates the meaning of true dependence on God.

#### **Joshua 5:13-14**

13 Now it came about when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing opposite him with his sword drawn in his hand, and Joshua went to him and said, "Are you for us or for our adversaries?"

14 He said, "No; rather I indeed come now as captain of the host of the Lord." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and bowed down, and said to him, "What has my lord to say to his servant?"

When Joshua asked the Man with the drawn sword: "Are you for us or for our adversaries?" the Man answered "No". Why did He answer in that way? It is likely because Joshua's perspective and approach were wrong. It was not a question of whether the Man was for Joshua or for the adversaries, but whether Joshua was on the Lord's side, and whether he was submitted to the Lord.

The Man said: "I indeed come now as captain of the host of the Lord". At that, Joshua fell on his face to the earth and bowed down in worship. This indicates that Joshua recognised he was in the presence of God. Note that the Man did not reject Joshua's act of worship. This was unlike other instances recorded in the Scriptures, when obeisance or worship was rendered to men or angels, but they rejected it. For example, in the Book of Revelation, the apostle John prostrated himself before an angel, but the angel rejected the act of worship, for it was not proper. Instead, the angel asked the apostle John to worship God (Rev. 22:8-9).

Further, let us take note of what the captain of the Lord's host said to Joshua in verse 15:

**Joshua 5:15**

The captain of the Lord's host said to Joshua, "Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so.

These words parallel Exodus 3:4-5, where God spoke to Moses from the midst of the burning bush and told him to remove his sandals for he was standing on holy ground.

**Exodus 3:4-5**

4 When the Lord saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am."

5 Then He said, "Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground."

Joshua recognised that he was in the presence of God, and he immediately submitted to the Lord, falling on his face and saying: "What has my lord to say to his servant?" (Josh. 5:14).

We see Paul responding in like manner, in a spirit of submission to the Lord in Acts 22:10, when the Lord Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus.

**Acts 22:10**

"And I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Get up and go on into Damascus, and there you will be told of all that has been appointed for you to do.'

Both Joshua and Paul focused on knowing God's will and purposes. They submitted to the Lord and waited for His instructions. This is the proper way and approach we should adopt. Our primary concern should be to know God's will for us and to align ourselves with it, and not on whether the Lord is for us or against us. Only then can we ask Him to be with us to strengthen and enable us. This is similar to the approach we should adopt if we want to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Our prayers for the fullness of the Holy Spirit will not be effective if we have our own plans and desires and our hearts are not consecrated to God. Only when we consecrate our lives to Him and commit ourselves to Him can we ask the Lord to fill us with His Spirit.

If we want to experience a meaningful sense of the Lord being with us continually, we need to be filled with the Spirit. The fullness of the Spirit means the Lord is present with us to a high degree. He is the One who can truly strengthen, guide, mould and transform us, so that His purposes may be fulfilled in our lives.

There can be varying degrees in the quality and meaning of God being with us. We must not be satisfied with just tasting a small measure of the meaning of God being with us. We must continually seek to attain to a deeper quality and richer experience of God's intentions for us.

### **Concluding remarks**

In this message, we have sought to have a deeper understanding of the meaning of "God being with us". We have seen that we ought not be satisfied with "God being with us" in the general sense. God was with the Israelites in the general sense when they were in the wilderness, but He was also angry with them, and they came under His judgement.

In life situations, it is often difficult to give a straightforward answer whether God is or is not with us in a favourable sense because often there are mixtures involved – in our goals, motives, approach and means. To some degree, God could be with us. Yet, He may also not be with us in a particular matter because it is something He is not pleased with.

We considered a situation where God may be at work but the powers of darkness can also be working. This arises when men have mixed motives and desires. They may have a genuine desire to experience the Spirit of God and His power for service unto the Lord. At the same time, there is pride and fleshly desires for recognition and excitement. In such a context, supernatural occurrences and emotional experiences are often emphasised and longing for dramatic manifestations encouraged. If we are not discerning, we may assume that all the supernatural manifestations taking place are of God.

There are varying qualities and richness in the meaning of God being with us. Let us not be content with just having a general sense that God is with us. It can easily degenerate into a very superficial experience of God being with us if we are casual about it. Let us not presume that, regardless of how we live, God will always be with us, and that He will never leave us or forsake us.

The Scriptures warns us against hardening our hearts like the Israelites. They presumed that God would never leave His temple in Jerusalem and allow it to be

destroyed. But because of their persistent rebellion against God, God's presence departed from the temple and God's people were sent into exile.

The Lord Jesus warns believers not to be falsely assured that all is well when it is otherwise. The church in Laodicea appeared well, but in reality, they were wretched, poor and blind. If they did not repent, He would spit them out of His mouth.

Peter and the writer to the Hebrews warn believers not to fall away from the living God and become entangled with the world after having tasted of God's goodness.

God's precious assurance of love, care and encouragement is for those who seek to walk with Him. It is not for those who choose to turn away from God, and who live a life of fleshly indulgence. God will not hear our cries if we live in persistent rebellion.

Let us seek to ensure that God is pleased with us to a high degree and that we have a deep sense of fellowship with Him. Then the Lord will be pleased to be with us, to strengthen, guide and enable us in all situations and matters and accomplish His will in and through our lives.

Therefore, let us reflect on our lives. Have we properly consecrated our lives to God? Is the Lord with us in a deep and meaningful sense? Is it growing in quality and meaning with passing time?

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