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JOSEPH AS SLAVE AND PRISONER MEANING AND IMPLICATIONS OF "THE LORD IS WITH YOU" (1)

Introduction

In the last message, we reflected on Joseph's life as a slave and a prisoner in Egypt: how he appeared to be in a miserable state and a victim of circumstances. On the surface, he seemed to be faring poorly and living a life that was meaningless, discouraging and outside of God's will. But in reality, it was not so because firstly, the Lord was with him and secondly, his attitude, response, perception, faith and conduct were generally positive.

To understand what a person is going through and how he is faring, it is helpful for us to have a fuller understanding of the concept "the Lord is with you".

Different shades of meaning and implications of "the Lord is with you"

When the Scriptures says that God is with someone, does it always have the same meaning? Does it imply that God is pleased with that person?

The expression "the Lord is with you" is used in the Scriptures in different senses and with different emphases. It may or may not imply that God is pleased with that person, or that He approves of his life and ways.

There are different shades of meaning, depending on the context. God was with the Israelites under Moses in the wilderness but God was often displeased with them for their disobedience. The Scriptures does indicate that the Lord is with all believers at all times. Yet many believers often grieve the Spirit of God. God is present everywhere and He is concerned for and cares for all mankind, including non-believers. The meaning of "the Lord was with Joseph" (Gen. 39:2) is much richer in meaning than the Lord being with the Israelites in the wilderness, His being with all believers and God's presence everywhere and caring for all mankind.

We will reflect on the different shades of meaning of God being with us in different contexts and how we can ensure that God is with us in a very rich and meaningful sense. If this becomes a reality, then, like Joseph, our lives will be a success – in the eyes of God and from the perspective of God's kingdom.

God’s call to specific people and His being with them

The Scriptures records the lives of many who were specifically called by God to carry out His plans and purposes. God was with them, took a special interest in their lives, watched over them, worked in them, and carried out His purposes through them. But God may or may not be pleased with their lives. The first example we will consider is Jacob.

Jacob

There is clear evidence of God’s special calling in the life of Jacob. Let us consider Genesis 28. Verse 10 tells us that en route to Haran, Jacob had a dream. In the dream, God spoke to him, saying:

Genesis 28:13-15

13 “I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants.

14 “Your descendants will also be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed.”

15 “Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”

Verse 15 emphasises God taking a special interest in Jacob’s life, to be with him, to watch over him and help him so he could fulfil God’s purposes. The emphasis is on God’s part. God being with Jacob in this situation does not imply that Jacob had positive attitude or that his response was positive.

Up to this point, Jacob’s life does not appear morally and spiritually healthy. In the preceding chapter, Genesis 27:19-20 tells us that Jacob deceived his father Isaac into giving him the blessing intended for his brother Esau.

Genesis 27:19-20

19 Jacob said to his father, “I am Esau your firstborn; I have done as you told me. Get up, please, sit and eat of my game, that you may bless me.”

20 Isaac said to his son, “How is it that you have it so quickly, my son?”

And he said, “Because the Lord your God caused it to happen to me”.

Thinking that Jacob was Esau, Isaac was puzzled that he was able to hunt and get the food ready for him so quickly. When questioned by Isaac about it, Jacob lied that God had helped him get the meal ready quickly (v. 20). Jacob thus compounded the

gravity of his deceitful scheme. In addition to lying, he had also taken the name of the Lord His God in vain.

Later, when the scheme was exposed, Isaac told Esau that his brother Jacob came deceitfully, and “has taken away your blessing”, the blessing that Isaac intended for Esau.

Genesis 27:35

And he said, “Your brother came deceitfully and has taken away your blessing.”

And yet, in Genesis 28:15, God affirmed that He would be with Jacob and would keep him until His promises were fulfilled. God did this because there were things He wanted to accomplish through Jacob for the benefit of the nation of Israel, and ultimately, for the whole world. In addition, it could be that God also saw in Jacob some indications of positive spiritual desires and potential for positive development in his life. For Jacob’s life to turn out well, he would have to respond to God positively.

God may at times work out His purposes through those whose lives are not pleasing to Him. He used the nation of Babylon to punish Israel. He spoke through Balaam and also through Balaam’s donkey to rebuke Balaam. He also used King Cyrus of Persia to accomplish His purposes. However, God generally desires to accomplish His work through people whose attitudes are positive. They respond well to God's call and they learn and grow even as God's purposes are accomplished in and through their lives. The next person we will look at is an example of such a man.

Joshua

Joshua is another person God specially called to accomplish His work. Joshua’s life was different from Jacob’s. Generally, Joshua’s attitudes and ways were pleasing to God.

As the children of Israel were poised to enter the Promised Land, the Lord assured Joshua that He would be with him.

Joshua 1:5-9

5 “No man will be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you”

6 “Be strong and courageous, for you shall give this people possession of the land which I swore to their fathers to give them.

7 “Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go.

8 “This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success.

9 “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”

In verse 5, the Lord promised His presence, saying: “I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you”. Likewise, in verse 9, the Lord encouraged Joshua to be strong and courageous, and promised He would be with him wherever he went.

These words of assurances by the Lord to Joshua that He would be with him took place after the Lord had already indicated approval of his life. God had earlier instructed Moses to commission Joshua, “a man in whom is the Spirit”, and that the sons of Israel were to submit to Joshua’s leadership (Num. 27:18-23). Joshua was described as a man “filled with the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him; and the sons of Israel listened to him and did as the Lord had commanded Moses” (Deut. 34:9).

But note that God also instructed Joshua: “Be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go” (Josh. 1:7). There was no guarantee of success just by the mere assurance that God would be with Joshua. To be successful, Joshua must be faithful to the Lord and keep His commandments. He must live a life that is pleasing to God.

When God says to someone, “I will be with you”, it does not always mean that God’s purposes for that person will be accomplished. There has to be a positive attitude and a positive response to God for the Lord’s intentions to be accomplished in and through his life.

Paul

Another outstanding example of a person specially chosen by God, and who responded well to God's call, is the apostle Paul. When the Lord directed Ananias to go to Paul (who was known then as Saul) in Acts 9:11-16, Ananias hesitated because Paul was well-known as a persecutor of the Church.

Acts 9:15-16

15 But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;
16 for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake.”

Paul was a chosen instrument of the Lord to bear His name before the Gentiles, kings and the sons of Israel. He had a significant ministry of founding churches and

teaching believers about church life and the purposes of God. Paul responded well to God's call and was a faithful and effective servant of the Lord.

As we read the Scriptures, and in particular the Book of Acts and Paul's epistles, we see that generally, the Lord was with Paul, guiding him, keeping him and enabling him. One such instance of God's assurance to Paul is recorded in Acts 18:

Acts 18:9-10

9 And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, “Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent;

10 for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city.”

Here, through a vision, the Lord assured Paul that He would be with him and would protect him.

John the Baptist

Sometimes, God calls a person to a specific role and task and his ministry may be relatively short. John the Baptist had a significant role in the fulfilment of God's purposes as the forerunner of the Lord Jesus, but his ministry was brief.

Luke 1:13-17

13 But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John.

14 “You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth.

15 “For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb.

16 “And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God.

17 “It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

The events leading to the birth of John the Baptist, and the predictions about him, show clearly God's hand upon him. He was conceived when his mother was advanced in years, and he was filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb. These are indications God was calling and preparing him for an important ministry and God would be with him and would empower him.

Bezalel

Bezalel was called by God to accomplish a specific task.

We read in Exodus 31:1-7 that God appointed Bezalel specifically to build the tabernacle with Oholiab. He equipped, enabled and filled Bezalel with the Spirit of God for this specific task.

Exodus 31:1-7

1 Now the Lord spoke to Moses, saying,
2 “See, I have called by name Bezalel,
3 “I have filled him with the Spirit of God in wisdom, in understanding,
in knowledge, and in all kinds of craftsmanship,
4 to make artistic designs for work in gold, in silver, and in bronze,
5 and in the cutting of stones for settings, and in the carving of wood,
that he may work in all kinds of craftsmanship.
6 “And behold, I Myself have appointed with him Oholiab, the son of
Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan; and in the hearts of all who are skillful
I have put skill, that they may make all that I have commanded you:
7 the tent of meeting, and the ark of testimony, and the mercy seat
upon it, and all the furniture of the tent,

King Saul

Though the Lord may have plans for a person’s life and desire to be with him to help him fulfil his role, this person may not fare well and may fail to accomplish the purposes God has for him.

For example, God’s purposes for King Saul’s life were not accomplished. God made Saul king over the nation of Israel and had plans for him to deliver His people from the Philistines.

1 Samuel 9:15-16

15 Now a day before Saul’s coming, the Lord had revealed this to Samuel saying,
16 “About this time tomorrow I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin, and you shall anoint him to be prince over My people Israel; and he will deliver My people from the hand of the Philistines. For I have regarded My people, because their cry has come to Me.”

God was with Saul and His Spirit came upon Saul mightily to help and strengthen him.

1 Samuel 10:6-7

6 “Then the Spirit of the Lord will come upon you mightily, and you shall prophesy with them and be changed into another man.
7 “It shall be when these signs come to you, do for yourself what the occasion requires, for God is with you.

However, things did not turn out well. Saul disobeyed the Lord, and because of his disobedience, God did not establish Saul’s kingdom over Israel forever. Instead, God sought out for Himself a man after His own heart – David.

1 Samuel 13:13-14

13 Samuel said to Saul, “You have acted foolishly; you have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God, which He commanded you, for now the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever.

14 “But now your kingdom shall not endure. The Lord has sought out for Himself a man after His own heart, and the Lord has appointed him as ruler over His people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you.”

In a wider sense, God is present everywhere and He is calling every individual to Himself. He has His intentions and role for each one of us in the outworking of His purposes. However, not all respond positively to God's call and His kind intentions towards us may not be fulfilled.

God’s call to believers and His presence with each believer

As God’s children, we can say that God is with every one of us and He takes a special interest in each one of us. He has a purpose and a role for each of our lives. He is always undertaking, watching over, moulding, transforming, and helping us to accomplish His purpose. In spite of our weaknesses and failures, God patiently and consistently helps us, so that we can walk with Him and fulfil His high calling for us. This is indeed a very comforting, reassuring, as well as challenging truth. If we can appreciate this well, it can make a great difference to our lives.

This truth of “the Lord being with us” can be found in various passages in the Scriptures.

In John 14:16-17, the Lord Jesus tells His disciples that He will give them the Holy Spirit to be with them forever.

John 14:16-17

16 “I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever;

17 that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you.

The Holy Spirit is to be our Helper and Comforter, and He will strengthen and enable us to bring about God’s intention and purposes for each one of us.

In 1 Corinthians 6:19, Paul tells us that our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. His Spirit dwells in us to help bring to pass God’s purpose for our lives.

The Lord loves us and is deeply concerned for each one of us. In John 10, the Lord Jesus tells us He knows each one of us by name. He is the good shepherd who watches over us, cares for us and lays down His life for us.

God being with us includes His concern for us and His sovereign undertaking for every aspect of our lives. This is what the Lord Jesus assures us in Matthew 10:29-31.

Matthew 10:29-31

29 “Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.

30 “But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

31 “So do not fear; you are of more value than many sparrows.

Not even a sparrow can fall to the ground without God's knowledge and permission and we are of more value to God than many sparrows. The very hairs of our head are all numbered. These are indeed words of deep assurance to God's children.

The apostle Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 12 that we are all members of the body of Christ. Verse 18 tells us that “God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired”. He has a place for every child of His in the body of Christ. He has a plan and purpose for each one. Verses 7-11 tell us that the Holy Spirit works through us and enables us. He grants different gifts to different members of the body of Christ to enable us to fulfil His calling.

In Philippians 2:13, we learn that “it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure”. His good pleasure is grounded in His will, character and perfect wisdom. Recognising this, we should work out our salvation with fear and trembling.

We must cooperate with God to bring about His intentions for us. When we all submit to Him, we will see a beautiful picture of the body functioning as it should.

Paul tells us in Ephesians 4 about the proper working of each individual part and the fulfilment of God’s purposes in the body of Christ for the building up of His kingdom.

The truth about God’s calling and love for each one of us is very enriching and comforting. God calls us not only together as a group but also as individuals. He is concerned for each one of us, and is actively seeking to bring about the special purpose and role He intends for each of our lives.

God is present everywhere and He is calling every non-believer to Himself

God is present everywhere and His love and concern extends to all mankind. Not only is God concerned for every believer, He is also concerned for every non-believer.

John 3:16 tells us God loves the world (mankind) so much that He gave His only begotten Son (to die for us and bear the punishment for our sins), that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.

In Matthew 5:45, the Lord Jesus tells us that God “causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous”. He cares and provides not only for the good and righteous, but for all, including non-believers.

In Acts 14:17, the apostle Paul preached to non-believers, declaring to them that God “did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness”.

2 Peter 3:9 tells of God’s patience, how the Lord “is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance”. In love and concern, He seeks to draw non-believers to repentance and salvation.

The Lord Jesus died on the Cross for our sins and He is now drawing all men to Himself (John 12:32-33).

God’s love and concern for non-believers goes beyond material provisions for their sustenance. He intends for all to be saved and to fulfil the role and purpose He has for each one of them in the body of Christ, and through church life, to fulfil the Lord’s purposes in the wider context.

We see that God cares for non-believers even before they respond positively to Him. However, whether believers or non-believers, the way we respond to God’s working in our lives would affect how God would continue to work in our lives.

In Romans 1:18-32, the apostle Paul issues a stern warning that the wrath of God would come upon those who persist in ungodliness and who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.

Romans 1:24, 26, 28

24 Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them.

26 For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions...

28 And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper

If there is persistent disobedience, God may cease His gracious working in their lives. We must never become presumptuous of the grace and love of God. The way God works is dynamic and is related to each person’s response to Him. He is a holy and righteous God.

“The Lord is with you” in the context of the positive attitude and response of men

Let us now consider situations where the phrase “the Lord is with you” is used in the context of the positive attitude and response of men.

Asa

Asa trusted God and followed the laws of God. He did what was good and right in the sight of God. He trusted God in a major battle against his enemy, as described in 2 Chronicles 14:11.

2 Chronicles 14:11

Then Asa called to the Lord his God and said, “Lord, there is no one besides You to help in the battle between the powerful and those who have no strength; so help us, O Lord our God, for we trust in You, and in Your name have come against this multitude. O Lord, You are our God; let not man prevail against You.”

The Lord routed the enemy and helped Israel. In this context, the Spirit of God came upon the prophet Azariah and he went to meet Asa.

2 Chronicles 15:2

and he went out to meet Asa and said to him, “Listen to me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin: the Lord is with you when you are with Him. And if you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you.

The prophet Azariah told King Asa that the Lord is with him when he is with the Lord. But if Asa forsakes God, God will also forsake him. This means that if Asa responds well to God, God will be pleased with him and will watch over and help him. But if he disobeys and rejects God, God will withdraw His presence and help. Thus, the phrase “the Lord is with you” is used here in the context of positive response on man’s part, when God approves of the person’s life and attitude.

Jehoshaphat

This expression, “the Lord is with you”, is used in the same sense in 2 Chronicles 17:3-4.

2 Chronicles 17:3-4

3 The Lord was with Jehoshaphat because he followed the example of his father David’s earlier days and did not seek the Baals,
4 but sought the God of his father, followed His commandments, and did not act as Israel did.

The Lord was with Jehoshaphat because he followed David’s example of obeying God’s commandments and not worshipping false gods. His obedience to God resulted in God’s approval and God being with him.

Jeroboam

We can see this too in the life of Jeroboam.

1 Kings 11:38

‘Then it will be, that if you listen to all that I command you and walk in My ways, and do what is right in My sight by observing My statutes and My commandments, as My servant David did, then I will be with you and build you an enduring house as I built for David, and I will give Israel to you.

Note that God’s promise to be with Jeroboam was conditional. If Jeroboam followed God’s commands and did what was right in His sight, God would be with him.

“The Lord is with you” in the context of God’s strong approval

God’s approval of a person can be of varying degrees, depending on the quality of the person’s character and response. Similarly, the richness in meaning and reality of “the Lord being with you” can also vary. The depth of fellowship that God has with His children, the way He undertakes and helps them, varies from person to person.

Consider 2 Chronicles 16:9.

2 Chronicles 16:9

“For the eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His. You have acted foolishly in this. Indeed, from now on you will surely have wars.”

The expression “the eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth” speaks of God seeking and looking out for that which means a lot to Him. He strongly supports “those whose heart is completely His”. This phrase can also be translated as “those whose hearts are fully committed to Him”. It is a definite posture taken by the person in his approach to life. It is a serious and definite commitment to do the will of God. Such people will seek to do God’s will rather than fulfil their own desires. God is looking for such people. He will have much freedom to speak to them and teach them. He will strongly support them and will work deeply in them and through them.

It does not mean that such people have no deficiencies and impurities in their hearts or that they do not fail. The meaning of this expression in the original text is ascribed to both King David and King Asa. David is described as one whose heart was wholly devoted to the Lord (1 Kings 11:4). However, we know David did have weaknesses and he did fail the Lord. Asa is also described as one whose heart was wholly devoted to the Lord (1 Kings 15:14). However, it is clear from 2 Chronicles 16 that there were weaknesses and failures in his life. Absolute, perfect commitment, oneness with God and faithfulness to God is true only of the Lord Jesus Christ. For us who seek to follow the Lord, even for those whose heart is completely His, it will be a lifelong process of learning, purification, transformation and growth in moral and spiritual statures.

When man responds deeply to God, the expression “the Lord is with you” is most meaningfully manifested. This is a very beautiful picture of man’s deep oneness with God. God is really pleased with the person and His calling for and through the person is being fulfilled to a very high degree.

This should be the deepest longing of our hearts and we should pray that the Lord’s purpose and calling may be fulfilled to the utmost in our lives. Such a longing and prayer would express what the Lord Jesus teaches us in the pattern prayer: “Your will be done” – as it applies to our own lives.

I would like to consider with you two categories of people whose lives meet with God’s emphatic approval. The first of these is those specially chosen by God to fulfil a significant role or task. The other is believers in general.

“The Lord is with you” in the context of God’s strong approval for those specially chosen by God

For the first category of those specially chosen by God to fulfil a significant role or task, let us begin by considering the perfect example of the Lord Jesus.

The Lord Jesus

The Lord Jesus exemplified a life totally committed to God the Father, whose purpose and calling for Him are perfectly fulfilled. This is what He testified in His prayer to God the Father just before the event of the Cross: “I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do” (John 17:4). While being crucified on the Cross He uttered: “It is finished!” (John 19:30).

John 8:29 describes this very beautiful picture of the oneness between the Father and the Son.

John 8:29

“And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him.”

God the Father sent the Lord Jesus Christ into this earth with a special task and mission – to die for the sins of mankind and be the Saviour of the world, to be the light of the world, to show us the way to the Father, and how life ought to be lived. God the Father watched over Him and undertook for Him. There was perfect, unceasing fellowship between them because of their oneness of heart and because the Son never failed the Father and always did what was pleasing to Him. It is fellowship of the highest degree. The Father is fully pleased with the Son, as we read in 2 Peter 1:17.

2 Peter 1:17

For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, “This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased”.

Paul

Let us now consider the example of the apostle Paul. Paul was a chosen instrument of the Lord, to be an apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15), to plant churches and to teach truths on church life and God’s purposes.

In Corinth, God encouraged Paul by a vision not to be afraid, but to go on speaking (Acts 18:9). God went on to say:

Acts 18:10

for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city.”

The phrase “for I am with you” expresses God’s presence with Paul as well as His approval of him. God undertook and watched over Paul and He helped him to accomplish what He had intended through him. God approved of Paul’s life because of Paul’s deep identification with God. Such was Paul’s identification with the Lord that he said: “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain”. In Acts 20:24, Paul said that he did not even consider his life of any account as dear to himself. His only concern was to be faithful and true to God and to complete the tasks God had entrusted to him.

In 2 Timothy 4:16, Paul spoke of a difficult time he underwent, when none supported him. But he was conscious of the Lord’s presence, which he recounted in the next two verses:

2 Timothy 4:17-18

17 But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was rescued out of the lion’s mouth.

18 The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

The Lord stood with him and strengthened him. With the Lord’s enabling and undertaking, Paul was able to accomplish what God desired to do through him. As his life met with God’s approval, he was fully assured of God’s support. He was convinced the Lord would deliver him from every evil deed.

Paul lived with a deep sense of God being with him and watching over him. The way he lived can be summed up by his own testimony in 2 Timothy 4:7-8.

2 Timothy 4:7-8

7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith;

8 in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.

Throughout his life as a Christian, Paul had been faithful to the Lord to a very high degree. He had fought the good fight and finished the course. He had completed what the Lord had entrusted to him and was convinced a glorious future awaits him. If we respond well to God, we too can look forward to the coming again of the Lord Jesus.

Joseph

Another example of a faithful man of God is Joseph. Genesis 39:2 tells us the Lord was with Joseph, so he became a successful man.

Genesis 39:2, 3, 21, 23

2 The Lord was with Joseph, so he became a successful man. And he was in the house of his master, the Egyptian.

3 Now his master saw that the Lord was with him and how the Lord caused all that he did to prosper in his hand.

21 But the Lord was with Joseph and extended kindness to him, and gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer.

23 The chief jailer did not supervise anything under Joseph’s charge because the Lord was with him; and whatever he did, the Lord made to prosper.

Verses 3 and 23 tell us that the Lord was with Joseph and caused all that he did to prosper. It was not just at a specific moment, but throughout his life.

Joseph lived a life of moral and spiritual quality and God was pleased with him. The Lord watched over him and undertook for him, moulding him and equipping him to fulfil His purposes for and through his life.

“The Lord is with you” in the context of God’s strong approval for believers in general

We have considered God’s emphatic approval on those who are specially called. What about Christians in general?

God has strong approval and support for every true disciple who is living and working out properly God’s calling for his life. As we have seen earlier, 2 Chronicles 16:9 tells us that God will strongly support all those whose heart is completely His. It is such people that He seeks for. He will strongly approve and support His children who respond to His call in this way, so as to enable them to fulfil His purposes for them in the body of Christ.

This kind of a life is beautifully expressed by the Lord Jesus in John 15:4-5.

John 15:4-5

4 “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me.

5 “I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.

The Lord said: “Abide in Me, and I in you”. This phrase incorporates two aspects. “Abide in Me” emphasises our response to the Lord, and “I in you” emphasises the Lord working in and through our lives. If we abide in the Lord, and live in obedience to Him and dependence on Him, our lives will be strongly approved by God, we will have deep fellowship with Him and God will guide and enable us to fulfil His will for our lives. This is the kind of life that we should seek to live. As we do so, God’s purposes will be fulfilled in our lives and there will be much fruit.

Let us remember that there are varying qualities in such a life. We should aim towards an increasing quality of fellowship and union with the Lord, and having our lives transformed by Him more and more.

How we respond to God will have a bearing on how He relates with us. When we respond well, He will entrust more to us. When we fail to respond well, His original intentions for us may change, as was the case with King Saul. God’s intention for his life was thwarted because of his disobedience to the Lord. May faithfulness to God be the primary motivation of our lives.

Concluding remarks

In this message, we have seen there are different shades of meaning in the expression “the Lord is with you”.

We have considered two broad categories of meaning of the expression. One meaning refers to God’s part: how God takes a special interest in a person’s life, to be with him, watching over, moulding, transforming and equipping him to fulfil His purposes for him and through his life. Here the person’s positive response and attitude is not implied but is crucial for a positive outcome for his own life.

In a wider sense, God is with all believers and He watches over and cares for every child of God. He is present everywhere and He is also concerned for every non-believer. But for them, His primary concern is for their salvation. He desires that each one enters His kingdom through the Lord Jesus, and having entered in, to fulfil the role and purpose that God intends for each one of them.

We also saw another use of this expression, “the Lord is with you”. It is used where there is implication of positive response and attitude on the person’s part and God is pleased with the person.

Finally, we considered how believers can experience the Lord being with us in the most meaningful and richest sense. This is when God is deeply pleased with our lives and works in us and through us and undertakes for us to a very high degree. We looked at the examples of the Lord Jesus, and of Paul and Joseph.

It is meaningful and comforting to know that God cares for each one of us. But recognising this is not enough. We must respond well so we can move in the direction He intends for us, and can experience God’s undertaking and working at the highest level. This is the goal that we should aim towards: a high degree of identification with God’s will and God’s strong approval of our lives.

The Lord may be with us and yet we may live pathetic lives. Let us respond well to the Lord's working in our lives so that He may be with us in a deeply meaningful sense – just as the Lord was with Joseph and Paul.

Let us reflect on our walk with God. Is the Lord pleased with us, and if so, in what sense and to what degree? How should we live so that God would be pleased to deeply abide in us?

Let us also reflect on where we have fallen short of God’s calling and approval. May the Spirit of God search our hearts and minds and have the freedom to reveal to each one of us our failures and weaknesses. Let us confess our failures to Him, affirm our love for Him and our willingness to live fully for Him.

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