

Remember, I Am With You Always
Matthew 28:18-20

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In the Great Commission in Matthew, Jesus did three things: First, he made an announcement. "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matt. 28:18). Authority is the right to command. Jesus is in charge of his Church. It is his Church and he has the right to direct it. We must always remember that we are under orders from our sovereign King. As long as this text rings out its trumpet-toned commission, any person who opposes missions is implicitly saying he/she knows better than Christ. Belief in missions and belief in Christ stand and fall together. To accept Jesus as Lord is to enlist under a missionary banner. James Denny once heard a distinguished missionary say, "Some people do not believe in missions. They have no right to believe in missions: They do not believe in Christ." It is quite impossible to be "in Christ" (to use Paul's matchless phrase) and not participate in Christ's mission in the world.

Second, Jesus issued a command. "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19). To disciple the nations means missions and evangelism—perhaps mission is a term that would include both missions and evangelism. P. T. Forsyth once said, "You may always measure the value of Christ's cross by your interest in missions. The missionless Church betrays that it is a crossless Church, and it becomes a faithless Church" (*Missions in Church and State, 18 - 19*). The concern for world evangelization is rooted firmly in the character of God and the clear command of Christ.

That command of Christ includes "baptizing them" and "teaching them." In the New Testament baptism was that act by which a person acknowledged Jesus as Lord and irrevocably took one's stand with Jesus. We must have that kind of commitment to complete the task given us by our Lord. Baptism in the New Testament is total immersion and it means total commitment to Jesus as Lord.

The purpose of Christ in his divine mandate is not fully met when persons are made disciples and baptized; they must also be taught. A lifetime of learning and observing follows conversion, until disciples are conformed to the image of their Lord. A real Church is always a teaching Church and a real Christian is always a learning Christian. The tragedy of so many of us is that we know so little and stop learning so soon.

Then Jesus made his disciples a promise. "And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20). That promise is made to all who acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus., who are obedient to the commands of the Gospel, and who are engaged in the mission of Christ and his Church.

It is an exceeding great and precious promise that has challenged many to give their all for Jesus Christ and the gospel.

One of the dearest men I ever knew was old Dr. Abe Cory, who was teaching Missions at the time I knew him. He first told me the story of Petrus and Dr. Susie Rijnhart who were serving as medical missionaries from the Christian Churches to Tibet. While on furlough in the United States their first baby was born, a little boy. The Rijnhart's were on their way back to the "roof of the world" in Tibet. They had traveled as far as they could by ship and boat and now were traveling in the rugged and steep mountains on horseback. The baby was resting in a little basket and had been quiet for some time. They stopped for a rest and found that somewhere along the trail the tiny one had slipped away—little Charlie was dead. Mrs. Rijnhart described him as "the only human thing that made life a labor sweet amid the desolation and isolation of Tibet." Aged one year, one month and twenty-two days. And there at the foot of the Dang La Mountains they placed his little body in an old box used to transport medical drugs and laid him to rest. They bathed his tiny grave in their tears and turned to face again the mission their Lord had given them. For days they pushed on higher and higher into the great mountains. One afternoon they came to a mighty river swollen far out of its banks by flooding. Petrus left Susie, his wife, on a high knoll overlooking the area while he went in search of a suitable spot to cross the river. Susie watched him as he disappeared around the bend of the river. Anxiously she waited as night came on. Little did she realize that as she watched him drift out of sight that evening that she would never see him again. He was murdered. It was learned later that he had been killed by a band of robbers. Bereft and with a grief that seemed almost unbearable Susie went back into China where she stayed for a time in the home of Dr. and Mrs. Abe Cory. After a time Susie announced that she was ready to go back into Tibet. The Cory's said to her, "But haven't you given enough to Tibet. Your baby lies buried in those mountains and your husband has been murdered. Haven't you given enough? Aren't you afraid to go into such a dangerous region alone?" And Dr. Cory reported that Dr. Susie Rijnhart said, "No, my Lord commanded me to go and he promised to be with me. If God goes with me I will never be afraid." And she returned to Tibet.

An old song we used to sing said, "If Jesus goes with me I'll go, anywhere." That song was true for Susie Rijnhart. She went out under the command of Christ and she fully believed he was with her to the end. "Remember, I am with you always..."

It is a great promise that has brought unbelievable strength to God's servants in the most difficult circumstances.

The Great Commission in Matthew was David Livingstone's favorite text. It was the passage of Scripture on which he staked his very life. Look at three quick scenes from the life of the man who did more to open the heart of Africa than any other man.

Scene One: Somewhere in the Heart of Africa. Livingstone is surrounded by hostile and infuriated savages. During the sixteen years that he has spent in Africa, he has never before been in such imminent peril. Death stares him in the face. He thinks sadly of his life-work scarcely begun. For the first time in his experience he is tempted to steal away in the night and flee to safety. He prays. "Leave me not, forsake me not," he cries. But let me quote from his own journal; it will give us the rest of the story.

"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 lo,(remember) I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.' It is the word of a gentlemen of the most strict and sacred honor, so there's an end of it. I will not cross furtively tonight as I 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."

Scene two: Home in Glasgow, Scotland. Later that same year Livingstone pays his first visit to the homeland. Honors are everywhere heaped upon him. The University of Glasgow confers upon him the degree of Doctor of Laws. On such occasions the recipient of the honor is usually subjected to some banter at the hands of the students. But when Livingstone rises, bearing upon his person the marks of his struggles and sufferings in darkest Africa, he is received in reverential silence. He is gaunt and haggard from his long exposure to the tropical sun. On nearly thirty occasions he has suffered attacks from fevers that steam from the inland swamps and these serious illnesses have left their mark. His left arm, crushed by the lion, hangs helplessly at his side. A hush falls upon the great assembly as he announces his resolve to return to the land for which he has endured so much. "But I return," he says, "without misgiving and with great gladness. For would you like me to tell you what supported me through all the years...? It was this: Lo,(remember) I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.'" On that pledge he hazarded his all. And it did not fail him.

Scene three: The Heart of Africa During the Last Days of Livingstone's Life. It is now eleven years later. He is alone save for a few native helpers and the end is not far away. He walked as long as he could walk; he rode as long as he could ride; and was carried on a litter as long as he could bear it. Now his feet are too ulcerated to touch the ground and his body so emaciated it frightens him when he sees himself in a mirror. The inward hemorrhaging drains the last of his vitality. A drizzling rain is falling. The native helpers hastily build a hut to shelter him. Two of his helpers go to bed with a third one to stand watch. The watchman is so tired that he sleeps, too. When he awakes in the cold

gray dawn he is filled with terror. Livingstone died on his knees! To whom was he talking when he died? He was talking even to the last breath to the constant companion of his long pilgrimage! Among the last entries in his journal is the statement—"He will keep his word." It is the promise of a "Gentleman of the most strict and sacred honour," whose word was to be implicitly trusted. Livingstone died, but not alone—"Remember, I am with you always..."

It is a promise as sure and true for you as for anyone who ever lived.

God is with us in all the experiences of life. "I will never leave you nor forsake you." "When you pass through the waters I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you" (Isaiah 43:2). "Do not fear for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am you God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand." (Isaiah 41:10). "Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." God is still God; and God's promises are still true. When you are called upon to plow the long and lonely furrow in some out-of-the-way place—God will be with you. When trouble surges over your soul; when you climb the steep and rugged way; when you are sure everyone else has forgotten—God will be with you. When disappointment breaks your heart; when you have sinned terribly and tragically; when betrayal and denial have been yours—God will be with you. When death invades the family circle; when discouragement steals the luster from your eyes and takes the spring out of your step—God will be with you. When you struggle against debilitating illness; when you turn to face the last sunset and take that long walk through the valley of the shadow—God will be with you.

The blessed secret God's servants are privileged to share is that when the light runs out and darkness covers you, when your strength is depleted and you can't go on—you don't find emptiness and nothingness as the Nihilist claims—but you find God. God is waiting for you at the end of your self-sufficiency. When you have reached the end of your tether, when you struggle in the depths of inadequacy, when you have fallen into a pit of failure—then God comes and shows you that your adequacy is in him. God's promise is as true today as the day it was first spoken.

The great old Scottish preacher Arthur John Gossip has a sermon entitled, "A Peep at the Last Page." His text is from Romans 10:12 as translated by Moffatt, and it reads—"No one who believed in him, the Scripture says, will ever be disappointed. No one." Dr. Gossip closes his sermon with these words—"No one who trusts in Christ will stand at last, white-face and cold at heart, with his life over, and his dreams all out, and his hope gone and proved only a mockery. The future may be dark and hidden, the road may be long and steep; there may be much to face, and much to bear. But one thing these men know, have proved, and build on it with absolute assurance. 'No one who believes in Christ will ever be disappointed. No one.' No, not you!" (*The Galilean Accent*, 294).