

Title: Always and Forever!
Text: Matthew 28.16-20
Theme: Christ's promise of his presence
Series: Matthew #134
Prop Stmtnt: If God is with us, it does and doesn't matter where we go.

Ever get lost as a child? I did several times. Once at a grocery store. Once at a department store and once at the St. Louis zoo and I wasn't even from St. Louis.

Read Text:

Do you remember how the book of Genesis is organized? There is one phrase that occurs over and over in that book that serves as the outline and the main idea. That phrase is: ***"These are the generations of..."*** It starts that way in Genesis 2 describing the generations of the heavens and the earth. The rest of the book is about the generations of Adam (chapter 5), the generations of Noah (chapters 6 and 10), the generations of Shem (chapter 11), the generations of Terah (chapter 11), the generations of Isaac (chapter 25), the generations of Jacob (chapter 37). All of the detail about the events: creation, the fall, the flood, and tower of Babel are to be understood in relationship to the people: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. From the beginning there are some very important truths that are reinforced for us, such as land and people. Why is land and people important to God? Because God created the heavens and the earth in order to have a kingdom for his Son. A kingdom has to have a king, and land and people. **Land + people = dom. King + dom = kingdom.** Genesis is all about land + people. What is missing is the king. Adam failed in that role. It is fascinating to see how that theme plays out in the rest of the OT. It is fascinating to me to see how that theme has played out in world history and is playing out on the stage of world history right now. But, why do I bring that up? Aren't we studying the end of Matthew? Yes, but how did Matthew begin? Without peaking, does anyone remember the very first words of Matthew 1.1?

"The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ." Matthew began with a family tree from Abraham to DAVID and then to Jesus. And what was so important about David? He was a king! Do you see what I see? Matthew is the Genesis of the New Testament. Matthew is the book of new beginnings and while Genesis emphasized land and people who needed a king, this 2nd Genesis focused on the King. Over and over Matthew has been writing so that we would see what an amazing king we have! When Jesus first started to preach he preached on the same topic that John the Baptist was preaching on, which was: the kingdom of heaven. So, when Matthew records the Sermon that Jesus preached on the Mountain, (chapter 5) we should not be surprised that his very first words (v.3) were, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." In verse 10 we read, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." In the middle of his sermon he teaches us to pray, and says that we are to pray for his kingdom to come (6.10). And then tells us to "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness ..." (6.33). It is abundantly clear that Jesus came in order to fulfill God's plan for him to have kingdom.

So, when we get to the end of Matthew we see that in this great commission, Christ is giving them/us a command that is the means for us to carry out God's plan for the world. The King has come. He died. He rose again and he remains with us. He is the reigning King and we are the subjects of his kingdom who are commissioned to go to all of the nations in order to call out for our King a people who are from every tribe, language and nation. And now it all begins to make sense. Picking up the theme from last Sunday morning, we see that the Father so loves the Son and so delights in his Son that he creates a universe for his Son to rule. His Son would make a perfect King. He is wise. He is compassionate. He is pure. He is trustworthy. He is kind. He is truthful. He is powerful. He is loving. He is merciful. He is omniscient. Any person ruled by such a king would be blessed beyond words. So the Father creates a world for his Son to be King over. But Christ is so glorious that he should rule over all people. He should rule over all the nations. So, we are commanded to go and make disciples of people from all nations. We are to tell them of this King. Wherever you go, make disciples. Some of you should go elsewhere to make disciples. We see that pattern in the book of Acts. Most of the people who came to faith in Christ gave themselves to the making of disciples wherever they went, while some of them went in order to make disciples of people in other cities or countries.

The spread and impact of the gospel was incredible. How do you explain it? The early church had no army. It had no standing. It was on the hit list of its home country. Its leader had been humiliated and executed and its early leaders and followers were marked for persecution and death. And yet it spread. Why? Were these people back then different than us? Did they not love their lives, or their families or their homes, or their comforts? I believe that *the spread of the gospel, the impact of a believer and the influence of a church are in direct proportion to the degree of belief in this promise of Christ.*

“I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

I. **It is an empowering promise.** “and”

The promise of Christ's presence is connected to the command to make disciples of all nations. Think of this. There were 11 disciples that Jesus gave this command to. Imagine if we were the only followers of Christ in the world. There are about 1100 more people here today than the 11 Christ spoke to. How daunting of a task is this? There are 196 nations in the world, which means that we would need to spread out so that there would be 5-6 of us for every country. Imagine that your family, and perhaps a friend or two, or you and another family were responsible with making disciples from an entire nation. Would you not think, “are you kidding me?” How on earth are we going to do that? Do you not think that the disciples thought the same thing? Make disciples of all nations?! It's not like they were experiencing a great deal of success where they were at the moment, were they?

But, here is what you need to understand about the nature of Christianity. On our own everything that we are commanded to do or be is impossible. However, with Christ, everything that was impossible is now not only possible, it is inevitable. Christ changes

everything. Apart from Christ, we cannot save ourselves. We cannot fix ourselves. We just keep making one mess after another. We cannot become Christians on our own, and we cannot grow as Christians on our own. We would never believe in the gospel on our own and after believing, if we could lose our salvation, we would. But, everything that Christ commands us to do, he empowers us to accomplish and that is the only way it gets done. In fact, the empowering of Christ is what guarantees that it gets done. You heard the gospel because someone believed this promise. Somebody went to another people, another culture, another land, banking on this promise in order to tell people about Christ. “I am with you always”, changes everything. “I am with you always” means that Christ is going to put you into situations where you are going to discover how much you have to rely upon him. He is present with you. Lean on him. Lean on him, he is here.

II. **It is a startling promise.** “behold”

Matthew uses the word translated “behold” six times in chapter 28. Every time he does he is drawing attention to something that is extraordinary and amazing. For example, in v.2 he uses to convey how startling the earthquake was. Then in v.7 it is used twice, although the ESV translates the second occurrence as “see.” Not only has Christ risen from the dead but you will see him in Galilee. Then, in v.9 Christ appears to the women and once again Matthew uses this word “behold” because as you can imagine, this is startling. That is how we are to understand this promise. It is startling in a good way. It is extraordinarily good because it is unlike any other promise. Here is what I mean.

Have you ever made a promise that you could not keep? There were a few times, (and praise God only a few times) when I made a promise to one of my kids only to have something happen that stopped me from being able to do what I promised. It was understandable and my kids understood, but I hated it. I was so grieved that I could not do what I said I was going to do. You know what I mean. You say that you are going to do something and then you get sick. Or someone else gets sick, or someone dies. Or the weather stops it. Every promise we make comes with a qualification, doesn't it? I will do this, Lord willing. I will be there, unless of course, I die or I get sick, etc. Christ is never at the mercy of circumstances. All authority in heaven and earth has been given to him. So, when he says that he will be with you always, he is not concerned about missing his plane, getting stopped by a train, getting laid up by an illness or dying. He did that once and even that didn't stop him, right? There is no way that Christ cannot keep this promise. Even when we make the most sacred promise that we can in marriage, we say, “til death do us part.” Death separates our relationships, but death does not part us from Christ, in fact death brings us even closer! This is a startling promise.

III. **It is a personal promise.** “I, with you”

Now, we may think, wait a minute. Isn't Christ going back to heaven? How can he make this promise when he is leaving? What does this mean? Well, here is where what he just said about the Trinity makes this promise understandable. In fact, John records that Christ, in the upper room discourse, already explained to his disciples that he was going to leave, but that in his place and on his behalf he was going to send a comforter. The

Comforter is the Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of God, and is also known as the Spirit of Christ (Galatians 4.6). Christ dwells with us through his Spirit, who is not an understudy, or last minute substitute who just got called up from Toledo because Jesus had some family business to attend to. Christ is present bodily in heaven, but is spiritually with us by means of the Spirit who is with us, in us, around us, for us, and whom has placed us in Christ. That means that everything that we do, we do as a part of the body of Christ. Listen to that again and let it sink in. Everything that we do, we do as a part of the body of Christ. Am I talking about the church? Yes. Am I talking about Christ himself? Yes.

1 Corinthians 6.15 – “Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?”

What makes your actual body a member of Christ? Now, before you answer that, I want to remind you what a member is. A member is an actual bodily part, which is why when someone loses a finger, an arm, or a leg, we call that dismemberment. So, what makes your actual body a member of Christ? It is the Holy Spirit! Christ keeps you by means of the Spirit. The Spirit will not let you go, but binds you eternally in Christ. When you come to faith in Christ the Spirit not only immerses you into Christ, but the Spirit also lives in you. He takes possession of you. Your actual body is a “temple of the Holy Spirit”. He is possessive of you because He loves you. You are not your own. You were bought with a price. That is, you were redeemed. (1 Corinthians 6.19-20) That is why you are to run as fast as you can and as far away as you can from sexual immorality. Sexual immorality is not only sinning against your body, but it is sinning against Christ. That is why this promise is not only personal, but it is a motivation for holiness and purity.

IV. It is motivation for holiness.

This promise that Christ makes to his disciples is very personal. That is what makes it so beautiful and so wonderful. But, it also makes it serious. The more beautiful and wonderful something is, the more serious it is. Think about it, what makes this promise so beautiful? The beauty of this is that we are united with Christ. We are with Christ. We are one with Christ. We are whole with Christ. Now, why is immorality called “unwholesome”? If something is whole, it is complete. But if something is unwholesome, it is separated, it is torn, it is broken, it is incomplete. Immorality makes a person to be incomplete, separated, broken, fractured, lonely, isolated, fearful, hard, crusty, layered, defensive, tough, even cold. Do you see why this promise is for our good? This promise speaks of a reality that is ours in Christ. It is a reality that is given for our enjoyment, confidence and security.

V. It is a powerful motivation for faithfulness. “I am”

There are two ways you can say, “I am” in the Greek language. You can simply use the verb **eimi**. Or you can say, **ego eimi**. When you say that, you are using “I” (ego) in a more emphatic way. We see this quite a bit in John’s gospel when Christ uses that expression (ego eimi) as a way of identifying himself as the great I AM and he uses before he identifies himself as the good shepherd, the door, the way, the truth, the life, the

vine, the resurrection and the life, etc. Here Christ does it again. He uses “I” in a specific and emphatic manner so that we do not miss the weight of this. I AM with you!

One of the decisive factors that led to Germany’s defeat in W.W. II was Hitler’s decision to invade Russia. And one of the decisive factors that led to Hitler’s defeat in Russia was the battle of Stalingrad. Think of that for a second. Hitler vs. Stalin. Do you see how much was at stake at the city of Stalingrad? Stalin would sacrifice everything in order to save that city from falling to the Germans. The stories around the battle for Stalingrad are legendary. One of the factors that led to Russia’s eventual victory is the fact the Russian generals knew that if they failed at Stalingrad, they would be executed. So, how did that motivate them? They told the officers under them, that if they failed, they would be executed, who told the soldiers that if they retreated, they would be executed. The Russian soldier had a choice. Either most likely die in battle or definitely die in retreat. Sure, Russia won that battle, but there was very little glory in it. It came through fear.

What is our motivation for following Christ? It is the love of God exhibited through the gospel. What is our motivation then to keep on following Christ? It is the love of God poured out on us through Christ. What does Christ say to his disciples? If you do not obey me, I am going to shoot you? No. He does not send them out in the battle while he hides safely behind a wall. He goes with them and because he goes with them, they will not only be faithful, but they will be successful. Beloved, you will make it home. You will make it home but not because you are strong, but because he won’t let you go. You will make it home, not because you hold on to him, but because he holds on to you.

VI. **It is an eternal promise.** “always”

One of the things that I have said to many of you as you are facing a bend in the road, is that God did not bring you all the way to this point in order to kick you to the curb now. We are not utilitarian to Christ. We are not a car that he drives until it dies and then he just goes out and gets another one. We are not an employee that he uses until we break, and then he goes out and replaces us. We all know this. As long as there are people who are desperate for work, there are some employers who will push their employees as hard as they can until they break them because they know that they can always find someone else to take their place. In a world like that, you are a commodity. You are just a tool. To Christ, you are not a tool. You are his! He is with you. His name is on you. He stakes his reputation to you. He is with you always.

VII. **It is a promising promise.** “to the end of the age.”

The average career length of an NBA player is 4.8 years. The average career of an NFL player is 3.3 years. Every year, new players are drafted who are younger, stronger, faster, hungrier, and who want your position. It happens at work, doesn’t it? Someone else is willing to work longer, does the job a little faster, knows a little more, has a few more connections, and so quickly you go from being the fresh face to fighting to be relevant. We peak early in life and are surprised of the toll that life takes upon our bodies. We squint to look into the future, but it’s a little fuzzy, isn’t it? We spend so much of our

younger years trying to get there, but once we get there, we look around wondering if this is all that there is; only to discover that things start to unravel rather quickly. My dad died at 69. My mom has had Parkinson's for 14 years. My grandfather had Alzheimer's and toward the end did not know anyone. The genetic lottery does not seem to be tilted in my favor. I have no illusions about the future, regarding its quality or duration. Most things in life are deteriorating.

But, this is a promising promise. It is not only a promise to be with us as we experience the realities of living out our days, but the end of the age is not a fading into the horizon. With Christ we do not go into the sunset and slowly disappear. We go into the sunrise and move toward an age that will only get brighter. This promise is the reason why I can laugh the laugh of faith. This promise is the reason why I can laugh the laugh of faith in joy or in sorrow. Sorrow is temporary, but joy is forever. Sorrow is real, but I am with the happiest, the most satisfied, contented, delighted, and amazing person ever. I am his and he is mine, and it is forever. I can laugh, not because I do not know the seriousness of things, but because I know the promise of Christ.

VIII. **It is the promise of promises.**

This was the plan from the beginning. God, with us. God walked with Adam and Eve in the garden. He loved that and everything that he has done since Genesis 3 has been moving us back to the day when we walk with him again. The tabernacle was God with us, to a degree. Then in Matthew 1, Matthew says that the birth of Christ was the fulfillment of the prophet's word who said that the Messiah's name would be Immanuel because, he would be, God with us. Jesus made this promise to his church, that even when 2 or 3 of you are gathered together in his name in order to carry out his mission, that he is with us. And this is reiterated here. I am with you always, to the end of the age. And at the end of the age...Revelation 21.1-7

What do we fear? We fear being alone. But when we rebel against God what are we doing? We are telling him to leave us alone. The worst thing that we can do is rebel against God and tell him to leave us alone, because if we persist in this, he will eventually do it. Christ's promise of his presence is a promise for community.

Conclusion

The genealogies in Genesis tell us what happened in this person's life and then who came after them. When Matthew records the genealogy of Christ he lists who came before, then he describes what happened. What he doesn't record is who came after because that is what we are doing. We are filling up the genealogical record of Christ by making disciples from every nation. Every person who comes to faith in Christ adds another brush stroke of beauty in the bride of Christ, and when she is complete, Christ will come for her to take her home. Until that day, he is with us, by means of his Spirit, loving us, caring for us, providing for us, keeping us, preparing us and holding us fast. We hold on to him, because we are gripped by grace.