

God with Us

Matthew 1:22-23—"Now all this came to pass that that might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord, through the prophet, saying, Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which is, being interpreted, 'God with us.'"

Let's have a word of prayer;

Lord, how we thank You that we could be in Your presence this morning to break bread, to remember You, to rejoice that now we are those marked-out ones. We thank You that we can celebrate this table. How marvelous it is! It is an indication that God is with us always. And as we turn to Your Word there is such an impression of our need to hear You speak. We need Your Word, we need for You to open Your Word. We need You to make alive Your Word because You alone have the words of eternal life. Your words are Spirit and life, and You make that grand promise we will never forget that when You send Your Word forth, it will accomplish what You send it forth to do. Now Lord, take these few verses and weave into them Your thoughts and give us Your Word as we wait before You. We pray that we will see what is in Your heart today, and we pray You will bless Your Word, and You will bless those who are hearing Your Word that we may hear more than just sounds and man's thoughts, however poor or however good, that we would hear the Spirit speaking what is in the Lord's heart. Lord, open our ears and open our heart and open Your Word. In Jesus' name. Amen.

By the way, for those of you that think I have become a traditionalist, and this is a Christmas message, I am sorry; it is not. But if you like it that way that is okay. You can have it as your Christmas message if you like. You might remember several months ago I shared in the open testimony time about three astonishing realities. I shared on three phrases that have made a deep impact upon my Christian life. The first is this phrase: "God with us." This is a very important phrase in the Word of God. You must know that to walk with the Lord and have fellowship with Him. The second phrase I shared was "God for us." Not only is He with us but He is for us. How wonderful that thought is! Then the last phrase was, "God in us." I believe these three phrases contain the highest assurances of God. They are tremendous! They are extraordinary! I do not know what adjective you would like to add, but they are indeed most wonderful. I can only think of that word in Hebrews 6:18 from that anonymous and anointed writer when he spoke about words that are strong encouragement. So this is what is on my heart for the next several times I speak. This is what the Lord has really impressed me with recently.

God With Us

Now I would like for you to think of it this way. We are only going to deal with the first one this morning. God with us is the assurance of His unfailing presence. Don't ever forget that. God for us is the assurance of His unlimited provision. Unlimited! Do not forget that word. God in us. I cannot think of anything more wonderful. Has that come upon you with a sensing of what it means? God is literally in you and in me. It is hard to describe, but I think it is the assurance of His unparalleled power, and I hope the Lord can make these things alive to us. You know, without these three astonishing realities you could not live the Christian life. It would be impossible. You could not begin to do what the Lord asks you to do. It would be utterly undoable. I think today

as we begin to look at this, I hope the Lord impresses you the way He deeply impressed me with these three words. "God with us."

I began to see it throughout the whole Bible once the Lord seemed to anoint that word. It seems to be a theme that runs from the beginning of the Old Testament to the end of the New Testament. It seems to be the message deeply imbedded in the Word of God. But not only is it just a message of the Old Testament. Many of you know those verses in the Old Testament, but the second thing we want to know is that it is the concluding message of the New Testament. It is the beginning and concluding message of the New Testament. And then I think we need to look at something of the meaning of this assurance, of His unfailing presence? What does it mean to you as a believer for the days ahead, for the trials ahead, for the difficulties ahead, for the blessings ahead? What will the assurance of His unfailing presence mean to you?

I was caught as I went through the Word in different places, beginning to the end of the prevalence of this phrase, "God with us." It occurs quite often. I believe it is the mark they know us by. "God with us." I think it is a secret we need as individual believers, and I believe it is the secret we need to live the Christian life together as the church of the living God. Without knowing God with us, where would we be? Just think of it! It is not by knowing just the words nor just memorizing the verses, but it is the reality of God with us that our whole life can be changed. And everyone around us can be affected by that. That is the importance of this wonderful three-word phrase.

I want to begin by looking at the Old Testament because those words lift us into a place of assurance that we could hardly know if they were absent. I think from the beginning to the end of the Old Testament it is very clear, God made it very clear, He intentionally made it clear. And He wants to make it clear to us that the one thing you will have is my unfailing presence, from beginning to end. It is not just the beginning of the Bible to the end of the Bible, but it is the beginning of your life with Him to the end of your life when you go to live with Him for all eternity. Even in all eternity you will see it is the emphasis of what John saw in the book of Revelation.

One simple way I would like to put it is I believe it is the golden thread throughout the Scriptures. We cannot look at so many of these, but I encourage you if you would just take your concordance, and I know 'with' is a hard word to use in your concordance, but maybe 'with us' will help you. You can start with 'God with us' and you can discover riches untold.

The Burning Bush

Exodus 3:3 is the story of the burning bush. It was when Moses was in Midian, and he saw what is described as that great sight of the burning bush that was not consumed. However, I believe he saw more than that great sight. It is quite clear that he saw the great I AM, and that great I AM is the One who assured him, "I will be with you." That is the beginning. How marvelous are those words!

In Exodus 3:12 God said, "For I will be with thee; and this shall be the sign to thee that I have sent thee: when thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain."

“For I will be with you, and this will be the sign.” How wonderful that is! Think of that, the revelation he had was not a burning bush which was not consumed, but it was God who declared to him in the very beginning this secret, “I will be with you.” That was it! And he said, “This will be your sign.” This is the great secret. I think that is so marvelous. You will notice that as you read the Word of God and you begin to see these phrases, “God with you,” you will discover that conjunction very often, that simple three-letter word, ‘for.’ It occurs again and again when He says, “for I am with you. For I will never leave you or forsake you. Again and again this is the amazing assurance that He gives us of His unfailing presence. He not only told Moses this, but He continued to tell all of His servants and the people of God this very thing. “I will be with you, and this will be the sign to you.” This is how it is possible. You wonder how the Christian life is possible? This is the only way the Christian life is possible.

I do not know how many have had a similar experience that I had when I was first saved, but I imagine from what I have read from biographies, many have. I remember being so transformed and saved until I thought, “I will live for You forever.” But it did not take me long to discover I could not live for Him forever. I did not have within me the urgency or the capacity or the ability to live for Him and do all that He asked. But then He began to whisper to me early in my Christian life, “I am with you.” I have never forgotten it. It turned me around. It made everything different. I saw the things that He required are not in our capacity to do, but they are there because He has given all of these things to us so that we cannot fail when He is with us. How marvelous! What assurance! What abounding that assurance is when you look at this. So this sign was *the* sign that Moses had, and it is *the* sign that we have. He will be with us. How marvelous! You begin to see it everywhere.

The Distinguishing Mark of the People of God

In Exodus 33:13-16, Moses learned something marvelous in the beginning that I think we need to learn right away. let me preface it without reading it all. Moses said to the Lord, “How will they know that we have found grace in Thy sight? How will they know we have found favor in Your eyes? How will they know?” That was the burning question. How will they know? Then these verses make it very clear beginning in verse 13: “And now, if indeed I have found grace in thine eyes, make me now to know thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thine eyes; and consider that this nation is thy people! And God said, “My presence shall go, and I will give thee rest.”

In the beginning, the overwhelming assurance that was given to Moses was that the unfailing presence of God would be the thing that made the difference.

And Moses said, (I think this is a very wise thing for us to often pray.) “If thy presence do not go, bring us not up hence. And how shall it be known then that I have found grace in thine eyes—I and thy people? Is it not by thy going with us? (That is what he saw. The assurance began to overwhelm him. Is it not by thy going with us?) So shall we be distinguished, I and thy people, from every people that is on the face of the earth.”

Now think about what that says. Moses learned something tremendous at that point. He learned that this would be the distinguishing mark of the people of God. In Revelation we know

about the mark on the forehead of those overcomers which is the name of their God. But early on Moses learned what that distinguishing mark would be of God's people, and it was, "I will be with you" My presence shall go with you, and my presence is an unfailing presence. You may fail, the people of God may fail, the church may fail, but My presence cannot fail." That was the thing, the distinguishing mark. How we need to know that this is our distinguishing mark.

I did not even know what that word meant when I was in high school. But I remember going to the draft board during the time when everybody was fearful about going to Viet Nam. I was certain that I was going to have to go to Viet Nam in the war, and I was certain that I would not return. It was a fear. I went to the draft board to get my draft card, and it was a big thing at that time of people burning their draft card and going to Canada. When I was filling out the application, it asked, "What is the distinguishing mark?" I thought, "What is the distinguishing mark? What were they talking about?" Then I thought, "I had a birthmark on the small of my back, and I said, "That is the distinguishing mark. If they found me dead in the foxhole and flipped me over, they would pull up my shirt and see this birthmark. That must be the distinguishing mark for them to know it was me.

But that is not the distinguishing mark of the people of God. The distinguishing mark, the thing that sets them apart from the world is this assurance of His unfailing presence that He is with us. In addition to that, He will never leave us or forsake us. You will go on to see that He will be with us to the end of the age, and He will be with us through all eternity. How wonderful! Can you have more assurance than that? You can tell people, "I have a distinguishing mark. It is not my big nose, it is not my big ears. That is not my distinguishing mark. My distinguishing mark, the thing that Moses discovered was, "He will go with me." How wonderful! Without that what assurance do we have?

Caleb and Joshua and the Ten Spies

Numbers 14:19 is the story of the people of God before they went into the land. After the ten spies went in, Caleb and Joshua who were faithful and believed that the Lord could take them in and they would overcome. But the people were in such fear and what they said is amazing. You know, we the people of God are quite onery people when you think about it. I am sure you know that to be true. They said, "It would have been better if we had died in Egypt or died in the wilderness. Why has Moses brought us out here?" I will tell you the secret beforehand. He brought them into those terrible circumstances, in that waste land of wilderness, among all those troubles to discover the secret. And the secret is, "God with us." That was the reason. And Caleb and Joshua tried to encourage the people of God.

Numbers 14:9 is what Caleb and Joshua said to the people who were so fearful. They did not know the secret and it made them incredibly fearful. He said, "Only rebel not against Jehovah." Now do you know that unbelief is rebellion against the Lord? And we know that the writer of Hebrews deals with the sin of unbelief.

They said, "Only rebel not against Jehovah; and fear not the people of the land; for they shall be our food, but their defence was departed from them, and Jehovah is with us."

This was the assurance. It was the only assurance. It was the one secret. It was the only thing they really needed to know in the wilderness—that He would never leave them. He would never forsake them. I believe this is one of the greatest assurances we need to know if we are going to live the life of a true believer that lives in fellowship with the Lord and with the saints.

There was another word that came to Moses. This is probably the most famous word in the Old Testament. This is the word God gave to Moses when he was told that he could not go into the land.

God's Assurance to Joshua as He Entered the Promised Land

Deuteronomy 31:6-8—"I have commanded you. Be strong and courageous, fear them not, neither be afraid of them; for Jehovah thy God, he is it that goeth with thee; he will not leave thee, nor forsake thee."

How beautiful is that verse! What a thing to hold onto!

"And Moses called to Joshua, and said to him in the sight of all Israel. Be strong and courageous, for thou must go with this people into the land which Jehovah hath sworn unto their fathers to give them; and thou shall cause them to inherit it. And Jehovah, he it is that goeth before thee; he will be with thee; he will not leave thee, nor forsake thee; fear not, neither be dismayed."

What a word of assurance that is to Moses, to Joshua, and to the people of God. "He will not leave thee, neither forsake thee." The Lord doubles down on His word. "He will not leave thee, neither forsake thee." How marvelous! This was the word that kept the people of God from being overcome with fear in the Promised Land. Everywhere the soul of their foot would tread, they could take the Promised Land. This is one of the key words about God being with us. You will notice also as you read that there is that little conjunction again, 'for'. "For Jehovah thy God, he it is that goeth with thee. He will not leave thee or forsake thee." Thank God, there is a reason. Thank God, that word 'for' is there, and thank God this is the greatest assurance of His unfailing presence in the whole of the Old Testament. It was the assurance not just to Moses; it was also the assurance to Joshua and to the people of God. Sometimes we say, "Now that is good for them. He is a servant of God, it is good for him. It is good for that dear woman of God, but it does not reach me." However, if you look at this very carefully, these three verses touched Moses, they touched Joshua, and they touched all the people. It became their secret. And it was the reason they could triumph in that dark place and overcome. I think this is assurance, deep assurance, unwavering assurance.

When I went to the Netherlands the first time to be with the brothers and sisters there, I was not adequately prepared. I did not understand altogether what state religion meant, but this extreme religion says that you cannot have assurance as a believer. When he told me that, I was stunned. I said, "Did you mean it? Do you really mean that you cannot have assurance? What about all those words in I John, 'I know, we know, you know.'" How can it be that we do not have assurance? They said, "Oh, you do not understand." They believe if the people have assurance, they become proud. I said, "Can that be?" Without this assurance you cannot live. You cannot walk in fellowship with the Lord. You cannot walk in fellowship with the brothers and sisters. It is

still a mystery to me. I have been there a few times, and I am planning by God's grace to go again, and I am thankful for the unfailing assurance. It has made a difference in my life. I believe it has made a difference in your life. And I believe it will make a difference in the life of everybody that comes into real contact with you and discovers who you are in the Lord. This to me is the assurance of His unfailing presence.

The Sweet Psalms of the Psalmist

It is not only at the beginning of the Bible, it is all through the Bible. Linda has a giant print Bible that is heavy to carry. My Bible is about 1500 hundred pages, and if I go about 750 pages, which will be the heart of the Bible, I find the Psalms. Now I happen to think the Psalms are 150 masterpieces. I cannot think of where we would be without the sweet Psalmist of Israel and his Psalms. How would we know how to worship God? How would we know how to commune with the Divine? How would we know how to pray? In the darkest times of history for me in my walk, the Psalms have been the most living. They came alive. I remember crying out for deliverance, and I found deliverance. I remember crying out for peace, and I found in those words "the God of peace." I remember above all discovering in those words a God that was always with me, and it made the greatest difference in my Christian life. He became my high fortress. He became my buckler and my shield, and like David said in Psalm 27: "You have become my salvation." But when you think of these Psalms, they are full; they are prolific. The theme running through those Psalms is, God is with those ones, and they were in communion with the living God. That living God made a difference in their lives and changed their circumstances, and made them into something they were not. I believe that is why the Psalms are the heart of the Bible and in the center of the Bible.

David's most famous Psalm, of course, is Psalm 23. Listen to what he discovered about God's unfailing presence. And you know that most famous verse: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, *for* thou art with me. Thy shield and thy buckler comfort me." This was David's secret, the sweet Psalmist of Israel, as he walked on that journey with the Lord. His grand secret was "thou are with me," and this, brothers and sisters, is to be our secret. Even though David failed, the God of David never failed. We often fail, but He never fails. I am so thankful for that.

I think of Psalm 139 which is another of David's Psalms; I think you probably know it. Listen to what he discovered about God's unfailing presence.

Psalm 139:7-13—"Whiter shall I go from thy Spirit? And whiter flee from thy presence? If I ascent up into the heavens thou art there; or if I make my bed in Sheol, behold, thou art there; if I take the wings of the dawn and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. And if I say, Surely darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night; even darkness hideth not from thee, and the night shineth as the day: the darkness is as the light. For thou hast possessed my reins; thou didst cover me in my mother's womb."

Brothers and sisters, surely if this is anything, it is a description of His unfailing presence. I think this should be our testimony. I do not think it was to be only David's testimony. I do not

think as he went through those difficulties and toils and struggles that he was just writing poetry. I believe it was a message for the people of God for all eternity that if you had that distinguishing mark upon you, if you were called by My name, you cannot go from My presence. You may think you can, but you cannot. And the one thing that will never fail is His presence. I think this is a beautiful thing.

Discipline is Never for Destruction

I think of Israel in its darkest of times, the history of Israel when they went into captivity, I struggle spiritually about this and understand to a certain degree. But imagine God sending His testimony, the testimony of Jacob into captivity. Why would He do that? Now I want to tell you something that has come to me many times and in a fresh way. God's discipline is never for destruction. Do not ever forget that. When you walk this life as a believer, God's discipline is never for destruction; God's discipline is always for recovery. And He sent these ones into captivity because of their sin and idolatrous ways, but it was only to cure them, even if He just found a remnant that would come back and know Him in fulness.

In Isaiah 41:10 it says, "Fear not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee, yea, I will help thee, yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness."

Now think about all those assurances contained in that one verse. He says, "Fear not, *for* I am with you; be not dismayed, *for* I am thy God. I will strengthen thee," and he does not just stop there. "Yea, I will help thee;" and he does not just stop there. "Yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." How marvelous! Think about the timing of this. They were in that darkest period in which they had turned from God, and He allowed them to go into captivity. But it was only so He could bring them back to this place of knowing Him in this deep assurance. It is incalculable assurance.

True Ministry

Then I think of the Old Testament and the way it ends. I love the ending books of the Old Testament—Ezra, Nehemiah, those historic books. I love Haggai and Zechariah, those prophetic books. And I remember years ago reading Haggai and meditating on it, and there were two verses that turned my life around. In Haggai, speaking of those who had returned in 1:13: "Then spoke Haggai, Jehovah's messenger, in Jehovah's message unto the people, saying, 'I am with you, saith Jehovah.'"

Now I think there are two very wonderful things in this verse, and I cannot tell you the great impact it had. The two wonderful things is that this is a description of what true ministry is. First of all, true ministry is Jehovah's message. That is what true ministry is. And thank God, in His sovereignty, in His mercy, He uses messengers, and it is the message of Jehovah that is in that messenger of Jehovah that makes for true ministry. Then the one word that he had for this remnant was that some were weeping over the condition of the house because some of the older ones remembered the glory of the past temple and were weeping, and some were rejoicing. And most had stopped building and began to build their own wainscoted houses. Then he brought this one word that made all the difference and that one word is "I am with you." That was the

key; that was the secret; that was what motivated them to get back to work. That is what changed them and they gave their life without reserve. The house of God was finished, and the recovery of God's testimony was assured. And he did not just do it in one case.

Haggai Saw the Secret

Haggai 2:3-4: "But now be strong, Zerubbabel, (he was the governor) saith Jehovah; and be strong, Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest; and be strong, all the people of the land, saith Jehovah, and work:" (Work is not a pleasant thing. The only thing that can compel you to work the work of God is when you see this secret, and the secret was,) "for I am with you, saith Jehovah of hosts."

That was the secret that got hold of them. And these ones who had given up because some of them saw something that did not live up to their expectations, and others found the things too difficult and began to build their own house for their own needs, and others outright quit. God had to speak to them a word that would inspire them to continue the work, and that word is, "*for* I am with you."

Brothers and sisters, this is the Old Testament. If you take this phrase out of the Old Testament, all you have is history and prophecy. If you put this phrase back into the Old Testament, you have the very heart and thought of God for the whole Old Testament. That was His design and thought in making man in His image after His likeness, and that is His design and assurance to the end.

Immanuel—God With Us in the New Testament

Let's look at a few verses in the New Testament. I believe, like the Old Testament, the message of the New Testament is the assurance of His unfailing presence. But it even goes to a higher degree. There is an extraordinary demonstration of Him making His presence known to the people of God, almost unimaginable. You remember that it was prophesied back in Isaiah 7:14: "Therefore will the Lord himself give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and shall bring forth a son, and call his name Immanuel."

This was the sign in the beginning of Isaiah. You remember how discouraged Isaiah was. He was discouraged because King Uzziah had died, and yet in the very next chapter God forecast the greatest thing in His heart which was that He would do the impossible; a virgin will conceive. You may disagree with me, but that is impossible in that context. Just to conceive outright is an impossibility so God does the impossible, and the emphasis is not on the virgin. Many of our dear Catholic brothers and sisters in the Lord have made the virgin the emphasis. The emphasis is not on the virgin; the emphasis is on the Son who was to be born. And He said, "I will give you a sign." The whole emphasis is on this word 'Immanuel.'

What does that mean? Immanuel means, "God with us." This was the sign that God would do the impossible. That word 'Immanuel' occurs only twice in the Old Testament. It is here and in chapter 8:8, and he talks about the Assyrians overtaking the land and their crushing power, and then it ends with verse 8 by saying, "Thy land, O Immanuel, God with us." How beautiful! Think about what that means. Man can only go so far. In all its power Assyria could only go so far.

In all its power Egypt could only go so far. Rome could only go so far. In the end, it is Immanuel's land, "Thy land, O Immanuel." That was the sign that was given. It is prophetic utterance about the New Testament.

Matthew 1:22: "Now all this came to pass that might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet saying, Behold! The virgin shall be with child and shall bring forth a Son, and they shall call his name Immanuel which is being interpreted God with us."

It was the beginning of the New Testament. This was the emphasis in the beginning of the New Testament. This great sign, this impossible thing, that He would bring forth a Son. And the emphasis about that Son was that He would be with us—Immanuel. I believe that is a spectacular assurance. That was God's thought from the beginning. Throughout the Old Testament that was God's thought, and that sign to Israel was God's thought. In the beginning of the New Testament, that was God's thought. Think of what He did—that impossible thing. God became Man. How impossible is that! It was a tremendous miracle for a virgin that had never been with someone to conceive, but it is an even more miraculous thing that God would become Man. It is even more miraculous that He would send His only Son. If I had been advising God, (and you are thankful that I wasn't), I would have said, "Send Gabriel, he does not show up too many times in the Scripture. Let him be the one who goes, although he does show up here." But it was the Son of God's love who was sent.

How much would it take for you to believe with all of your heart, with unwavering assurance, without any shred of doubt that God is with us? What would it take? I will tell you what it would take. It would take the One who would not spare His only Son. It would take the One that was His Darling from the beginning. It would take the One whom this God could not hold back and say when He was baptized and on the Mount of transfiguration, "this is My Beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." It would take that kind of assurance, but that is the impossible thing that God did. Can you imagine! "And His name shall be called Immanuel."

In Matthew, like Isaiah, he did not want to leave any doubt. He did not want you to dig up your concordance just to convince yourself of what it meant. He did not leave even a shred of doubt. He said, meaning, "God is with us." To me that is the most wonderful thing. I can hardly take it in when I think about God not sparing His Son. There is no greater miracle. Someone said, "The miracle of the birth is the virgin." That is not the miracle. It is a miracle but not *the* miracle. The miracle is the birth of the Son. So God can prove to His people once and for all that He will never leave them or forsake them. That is *the* miracle.

Matthew 18:20 speaks to us of the church. That passage is about the local church, and if you are like me when you read that passage, you just see the problem of the sinning brother. I wonder, if in the church, we do not see the problems of brothers and sisters more than we see the Lord's presence. But that is not what the Lord ended with when He talked about His church. He said, "Wherever two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them." That was the thing. That is the distinguishing mark of the church. It is not that we believe the same doctrine. My goodness, you can imagine the arguments we have had down through the church age. It is not that I believe in several resurrections and you believe in one. It is none of those things. It is not your feelings about the priesthood of all believers. The one distinguishing mark

is, "God is with us." He will never take His presence away from us. When two or three who gather in My name and have problems, or when they disagree on things, the one thing that is inarguable is, "I will be in their midst." I think that is amazing.

In the end of Matthew 28:19-20 it says, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have enjoined you. And behold, I am with you all the days, until the completion of the age."

This is the last recorded word of Matthew. He wanted to make it clear as he presented this King of kings and Lord of lords that this was the last impression that he wanted to leave before He was resurrected back to glory. "Behold," and he said it with emphasis, "I am with you all the days even to the completion of the age."

I always think of that wonderful story told by Campbell Morgan. By the way, I have Mary Ann's book on Matthew by Campbell Morgan which she had given to me a number of years ago. Mary Ann is my mother-in-law, for those who do not know, also Linda and Ben's mother, who just passed away a month ago. That book was underlined throughout, then she took a yellow highlighter and highlighted all through the book, and I could hardly read it. But at the end was the story Campbell Morgan told. He said that he went to this dear old sister of eighty-five years old, and he was reading to her from Matthew. By the way, that is good counsel. If you do not know what to say when you go to visit someone, just read the Word. He was a young man at that time, and he read these words, "And behold, I am with you all the days until the completion of the age," and he said, "That is a great promise." And that dear old lady of eighty-five years old with a glint of sanctified humor in her eyes said, "That is not a promise at all; that is a fact."

Do you know that fact? Do you know the difference? If I promise you something, you may not get it. If God promises you something, you will get it. This is an eternal fact. This is an unchangeable fact. It cannot be altered because it was the words of our Lord Himself.

In Hebrews 13:5, the writer of Hebrews told them not to be consumed by the love of money. How many of us that touches! But to be satisfied with our circumstances. He resurrected that ancient promise that was given to Moses, "I will be with you always. I will be with you forever. I will not leave you or forsake you." And He resurrected it to these Jewish believers who were beginning to doubt, "Was God's Word true?" They were beginning to go back to the shadows and not the reality, and this was the reality that he brought to them.

When I read Revelation 21, the emphasis is on that city coming down as a bride prepared for her husband, and it says, "God is with them, and God will be their God." That is the secret. Right now this precious assurance is an eternal fact and it is ours, but then it will be shadowless and there will be no doubt. In all eternity we will enjoy this amazing fact, "God with us, and He shall be their God, and they shall be His people."

Brothers and sisters, this is the burden that is on my heart. It is so real to me. I apologize if I have not made it real to you. But it has deep meaning. It means that we can have immediate and continuous fellowship, unbroken fellowship. It means that we can have an unshakeable faith because it is an eternal fact. It means that we can know Him and not just know about Him. It

means we are never alone. I want to tell you something. If you have not experienced this, the Christian life can be lonely, but you are never alone. Do you know the difference? The Christian life can be a lonely walk. You will not be surprised who was your friend and is no longer your friend, one who used to like you and no longer likes you. There is a price to pay, but here is the great assurance. You are never alone.

John Wesley's Last Words

I remember the story about John Wesley when he was dying; he was on his death bed. The Methodists were called Methodist because they did things by method. They believed in living well, but they also believed in dying well. And there was a book that made such an impact on John Wesley's life by Jeremy Taylor, "The Rule of Dying Well." I think it would be a help if we could find it. In Wesley's last moments on earth, those he loved and those who loved him were gathered around him. They were sharing verses, singing hymns, praising God, and they were rejoicing because they believed in the secret of dying well. Then when Wesley was about to expire, he seemed to muster just enough strength to say, "The best of all is God with us." Then when they thought he was passing, he mustered even more strength, and John Wesley, that great man of God, raised his arm into the air and shouted his last words, "The best of all, the best of all is, "God with us." Is that the assurance you have? Do you know that? We have to know that. If we do not know that, what do we know? But if you know this, it is enough; "God with us."—The assurance of His unfailing presence.

Father, we thank You that Your Word is full of deep secrets for Your own. Those who You call by name, those You set apart and sanctify for yourself, there are deep mysteries and deep discoveries to be found, and those discoveries can change us from what we were into what we should be. Lord, we pray that You would take this phrase, "God with us," and imbed it so deeply in our spirit and in our heart that daily we will know Your unfailing presence in whatever circumstance we are in, and that daily, as we are gathered as the people of God together with all the problems and difficulties, we would know God is with us. And above everything else that would be our greatest assurance. These things we ask in the name of Jesus. Amen.