Focus Shifts to God, Part 2: Encouragement

What "I am with you" means, from Jacob to Gideon to the Great Commission

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, April 25, 2021
PASSAGES	Matthew 28:16-20; Genesis 28:13-15; Exodus 3:7-12; Judges 6:12-16; 1 Samuel 17:45-47; Jeremiah 1:6-8; Genesis 39:2-3; Joshua 1:3-5; 2 Kings 18:5-7; 2 Chronicles 17:3-5
MESSAGE	Begins at 0:56:18 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

The Great Commission is not Jesus passing us a baton and checking in occasionally like a babysitter. Across Scripture, when God says "I am with you," he means: I am committed to doing this, I am the brains and the muscle, and you get to come along. So we go to the nations trusting a competent Lord, not carrying his work for him.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Small shifts in focus make a big difference, especially in prayer and mission – the two areas where Christians feel most insecure.
- You can read Matthew 28 as Jesus handing off his authority and leaving us to finish the job. But he never said he was giving his authority away. It stays his.
- In Scripture "I am with you" means God will keep his promises, give success and favor, and fight the battle himself – for Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Gideon, David, Hezekiah, Jehoshaphat and Jeremiah.
- When God says "I am with you," it really means "you are with me." He takes responsibility, and letting us help is a way of honoring us.

- Gideon's three hundred did not need better swords or more practice. They needed to trust that the battle was the Lord's.
- We blunder through evangelism like Bruce Lee's chubby little brother – but we are in the fight with the one who is actually winning it.
- Without the central ingredient of trust, mission turns resentful. With it, there is joyful anticipation of what God will do with our neighbors and co-workers.

▶ 0:56:18

With some of Hope's women still away on retreat, Matt began by praying for them, and thanked Caroline Owens and John Patrick for a worship set fixed on Christ's second coming – "this will dovetail nicely." Then the second half of a two-part series meant to encourage the church by shifting its focus from ourselves to God.

Why prayer and mission

▶ 0:57:31

A focus shift "may feel small when you describe it, but it's actually monumental when you do it." Matt recalled last week's examples: the roommates writing down everything that bothers them about each other, and the difference between praying "God, would you please be with me" and "thank you that you are with me" – "I don't want to start with a seed of doubt at the very core of my prayer."

▶ 0:58:28

He chose the Lord's Prayer and the Great Commission because they are the two big areas where Christians feel most insecure. Last week showed the first half of the Lord's Prayer is God-focused – sanctify your name, let your kingdom arrive, let your will happen. The same shift belongs in how we read the Great Commission.

The text, and two ways to see it

▶ 1:00:18

> "Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'"
>
> MATTHEW 28:16–20 ↗

▶ 1:00:53

People can read this passage and come away with completely different conclusions, Matt said – like the internet photo of a dress some saw as white and gold and others as blue and black.

▶ 1:01:50

One reading: Jesus started a great movement and passed us the baton. He has delegated his authority, he is busy preparing rooms in his Father's house, and he will check on us now and then "like a babysitter might." That feels like a heavy yoke, not a light one – "probably worse than you telling your own kids to do the taxes." And doing it for him without him "is not a good mentality to go into it with."

▶ 1:02:52

But Jesus did not say he was giving us his authority. "It's his, he gets to keep it – which is a good thing, actually. If he gave it to us, that'd be a disaster." Nor did he say, "I'm sending you without me." He said, "I am with you." In English that can mean "I'm with you in spirit" (I'm not there at all) or "I'm with you, man" (I agree). So what does it mean when God says it?

What "I am with you" means in Scripture

▶ 1:03:58

Jacob. Asleep on a stone on his way to Haran, he dreams of the Lord promising land, offspring and blessing for all the families of the earth:

> "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."
>
> GENESIS 28:13–15 ↗

Here "I am with you" means God will perform his promises.

▶ 1:05:09

Joseph. "The Lord was with Joseph, and he became a successful man" (Genesis 39:2–3). In prison, "the Lord was with him… whatever he did, the Lord made it succeed" (Genesis 39:21–23). God with someone means success and favor, "because God is the one acting."

▶ 1:06:38

Moses. God says, "I have come down to deliver them… and to bring them up out of that land." Then he gives Moses the very task he just said he would do himself:

> "'Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.' But Moses said to God, 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?' He said, 'But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.'"
>
> EXODUS 3:7–12 ↗

▶ 1:07:44

"Who am I?" "But I am with you" – a tacit acknowledgement that you are nobody without me, and didn't I just say I would do it? "He's the brains of this operation. He's the muscle of the operation. Moses is his tagalong."

▶ 1:08:18

Joshua. "Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you" (Joshua 1:3–5). When Moses held up his hands over the battle and Israel prevailed (Exodus 17:11), "it's not like they had different swords, different shields, different men. It was God's blessing."

▶ 1:09:56

Gideon. Hiding from the Midianites, he is greeted, "The Lord is with you, O mighty man of valor," and asks why Israel is oppressed. God does not answer that; he says go. "Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house." "But I will be with you, and you shall strike the Midianites as one man" (Judges 6:12–16). In other words: nothing to worry about, this is my fight.

▶ 1:11:01

Samuel and David. The Lord was with Samuel and let none of his words fall to the ground (1 Samuel 3:19). And a boy walked out to a giant:

> "You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand… that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the Lord saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the Lord's, and he will give you into our hand."
>
> 1 SAMUEL 17:45–47 ↗

▶ 1:12:42

"I would have loved to have been on the front lines of that army, just sort of waiting, terrified… you're like, did you just say that?" And later: "David had success in all his undertakings, for the Lord was with him" (1 Samuel 18:14).

▶ 1:13:15

Hezekiah and Jehoshaphat. "You're like, Matt, I get it. Just a few more." Hezekiah trusted the Lord, "and the Lord was with him; wherever he went out, he prospered," even defying the king of Assyria (2 Kings 18:5–7) – not because he struck good deals, but because God fought for him. "The Lord was with Jehoshaphat… therefore the Lord established the kingdom in his hand" (2 Chronicles 17:3–5) – not his advisers or his charm.

▶ 1:14:53

Jeremiah. "I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth." Some of us hear God's reply as a mafia threat – when I send you, you go. It is an assurance:

> "Do not say, 'I am only a youth'; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the Lord."
>
> JEREMIAH 1:6–8 ↗

▶ 1:16:02

"They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, declares the Lord, to deliver you" (Jeremiah 1:18–19).

"You're with me"

▶ 1:16:44

So does "I am with you" mean: better do your homework, you might make it, go ahead and start panicking? No. "God is saying, I am committed to doing this. I am committed to seeing through what I have promised."

▶ 1:17:19

> *"I am with you means I'm in charge and you're my tagalong, not the other way around... I am going to get it done, and I'm nice enough to let you help, as a way of honoring you."*

Gideon's three hundred

▶ 1:17:53

Gideon had 32,000 men, already outnumbered, and God said: too many, or you will think you won it yourselves. Twenty-two thousand fearful men went home. Still too many – "I'd love for him to show up at a missions conference like that." Those who drank from the water like dogs were set apart, and Gideon was left with three hundred.

▶ 1:19:37

The plan: torches, jars and trumpets, three companies of a hundred around the camp. Matt imagined the questions: torch in the left hand or the right? Wave it clockwise? Smash the jar, toss it or drop it? "Stop worrying about all these little details. You guys drink water like dogs – I thought you'd be more chill."

▶ 1:20:42

Still afraid, Gideon crept close and overheard a Midianite's dream of a barley loaf flattening a tent – "God has given into his hand Midian." Then the jars broke, the torches blazed, the trumpets sounded – "A sword for the Lord and for Gideon!" – and the Midianites turned on each other in the dark (Judges 7).

▶ 1:21:35

Put yourself in their shoes. Did they need extra swords or extra practice? Did David want a man with a crossbow on the side, just in case? Did the faithful kings trust the Lord but study extra jiu-jitsu? Did Moses hire his own magicians in case his staff failed? "What was the most important ingredient? Trusting that this is the Lord's fight. That this is the Lord's battle."

Back to the Great Commission

▶ 1:23:27

Read it again with that lens. "All authority… has been given to me" – not chopped up "like a cheese grater, here's some of my authority." He keeps it; the kingdom is wrapped around his being enthroned. And "I am with you" is God the Son incarnate saying it. "You can rest assured that you're not in the project alone… you're not going to be the brains of this project… you're not going to be the muscle either."

▶ 1:24:38

It is like a group project where you are paired with Albert Einstein on intense calculus. You will probably get an A, but you still contribute your darndest – "without all the panic… without getting like a Christ complex about it."

▶ 1:25:44

Or a kung fu movie with ten minutes left, when the Bruce Lee character enters the fight: "it is on now." That inspires you to jump in – as "Bruce Lee's chubby little brother," swinging and missing, tripping over your own feet, head stuck in a box, trying to kip up and doing the worm instead. "That is exactly how we are doing evangelism. We are blundering our way through it."

▶ 1:27:20

Who is the real seeker and saver of the lost? The ninety-nine sheep may not even have noticed the shepherd leave (Luke 15:4–7). When we pray for a harvest we pray to the Lord of the harvest, not a boss in the air conditioning who never lifts a finger – Jesus rebuked leaders who bind heavy burdens and will not move them with their finger. Ours pays a whole day's wage for an hour's work (Matthew 20:1–16).

▶ 1:28:21

Could he get his bride without help? Yes – he could use angels. He lets us help, the way working beside Einstein bonds you to him and teaches you, until next semester you sign up for things way over your head because he is your partner. "Us being able to do the commands of the Lord with the Lord is not a signal from heaven to earth that we are really understaffed… It's an invitation, Father to son or Father to daughter: let's do this."

▶ 1:29:21

"Don't think that any level of incompetence is going to get between him and getting his bride." At the end of the fight Bruce Lee says, "Hey, I saw you in there, man. That was brave… you got some good hits." He could take one afternoon to confront the church's worst opponent and "blast him into the kingdom and make him an apostle." He did it once.

▶ 1:30:26

So shift your focus as you pray, seek opportunities for outreach and make disciples. “If we don’t have that central ingredient of trust, then the rest isn’t worth very much.” Without it we get bent out of shape and resentful, doing evangelism because someone made us. With it there is “a joyful anticipation – what kind of opportunities could come up? I’m praying for my neighbors, I’m praying for my co-workers. God, what are you doing?”

▶ 1:31:52

He prayed for the church to grow in trust and keep its eyes on God, and left one parting word: “If you don’t take anything else away from this, meditate on the competence of our Lord… the competence and power of Jesus. That’ll melt your heart in the right directions.”

FOR FURTHER STUDY

SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- Matthew 28:16–20
- Genesis 28:13–15
- Genesis 39:2–3
- Genesis 39:21–23
- Exodus 3:7–12
- Joshua 1:3–5
- Exodus 17:11
- Judges 6:12–16
- 1 Samuel 3:19
- 1 Samuel 17:45–47
- 1 Samuel 18:14
- 2 Kings 18:5–7
- 2 Chronicles 17:3–5
- Jeremiah 1:6–8
- Jeremiah 1:18–19
- Judges 7:1–22
- Luke 15:4–7
- Matthew 9:38
- Matthew 23:4
- Matthew 20:1–16

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. When you hear the Great Commission, which picture comes to mind first – Jesus passing you a baton, or Jesus saying “you’re with me”? Where did that picture come from?
2. Of the “I am with you” stories Matt walked through – Jacob, Moses, Gideon, David, Jeremiah – which one speaks most to where you are right now, and why?
3. What would Gideon’s three hundred have been tempted to rely on instead of trust? What are the equivalents in how you approach sharing your faith?
4. Matt pictured us as Bruce Lee’s clumsy little brother in the fight. How does it change your fear of failing at evangelism to know the outcome rests with Jesus?
5. Name a neighbor or co-worker you could pray for this week with “joyful anticipation” rather than obligation. What might you ask God to do?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Matt Ryniker is Hope Chapel’s senior pastor — his own description of the job — and reports to the church’s governing board, who he cheerfully calls his boss. He and his wife Mandy have been held up from Hope’s own pulpit as an example to the congregation. He spent a stretch of his working life as a public school teacher, and he still teaches the parent dedication classes where families commit to raising their children to follow Jesus — a theme that runs straight into this message.

Watch the full message:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dL7iVzlJe10&t=3378s

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.