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## A SUPREME ASSURANCE

“ I am with you always, even unto the end of the world ”  
(Matt. xxviii. 20).

It was neither Buddha nor Mohammed, Socrates nor Plato who uttered these words. There is no record that any one of the many who have claimed the right to command and lead mankind has ever dared promise his followers eternal comradeship. Nor did Moses or the prophets venture such an assurance. It has meaning only on the lips of Him who very calmly said, “ Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my word shall not pass away ”. Yet there are some who would have us believe that these words, although spoken by the Master, were intended to be taken figuratively, that they indicate the memory of Christ’s life and character, and the influence of His teaching. The comfort of the assurance they would reduce to a beautiful symbolism. But to say this is to narrow and actually misconstrue the meaning of Christ’s words, and to place them on a merely human plane.

### I. THE MEANING OF THE ASSURANCE

The universal experience of believers is that these words are to be taken literally, to mean the personal, abiding, victorious presence of Christ. Assurance of the divine presence was given to the saints of the Old Testament dispensation,—to Moses, Joshua, David, and Isaiah. But while the Old Testament gave us the comfort of the Twenty-Third Psalm, in the main its thought was rather that of the Eighth, “ When I consider the heavens, the work of thy fingers . . . What is man, that thou art mindful of him ? and the son of man, that thou visitest him ? ” God was far away, unseen, an awful judge. But the New Testament changed the picture completely. Christ not only comes close to us, but in His incarnation identifies Himself with our humanity and takes that humanity back to the very throne of God, where at the right hand of the Father He is even now our advocate. And in all the reaches of eternity to

come He will not lay by that human nature put on in Bethlehem's manger. Only because of His humanity could the fellowship be so close. To say with Amelia Josephine Burr:

Not from two who supped with You  
 At an inn as twilight fell  
 Do I know that Joseph's tomb  
 Was an empty shell.

Not from Peter or from John  
 Or from Mary or from Paul  
 Did I learn how life can change  
 At Your call.

Not on the Damascus Road  
 Or in any far-off place  
 Did my spirit see the dawn  
 Of Your face.

Those who lived in Galilee  
 Knew their Lord and held Him dear—  
 But my Lord has come to me  
 Now and here.

Christ is present as our leader. The occasion of the promise was the giving of the Great Commission, "Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations . . ." It is in the strength of this assurance of the presence of our Lord Himself that missionaries in all ages have been willing to leave family and friends, to endure great hardship, and to risk life itself. David Livingstone, one of the great missionaries of all times, with his face bearing the brand of the African sun and his right arm chewed off by a lion, on the occasion of the University of Glasgow conferring upon him the degree of Doctor of Laws, referred to our text, "I am with you always", saying: "On these words I stake everything." "I am the light of the world" means there is no problem, whether it be personal, family, national, or international on which Christ cannot give light and guidance. In his poem, "A Death in the Desert", Robert Browning thus voices his sentiment on the mysteries and seeming contradictions of life:

I say, the acknowledgment of God in Christ  
Accepted by thy reason, solves for thee  
All questions in the earth and out of it,  
And has so far advanced thee to be wise.

We are beset by manifold temptations and dangers. But in His humanity Christ met with those very temptations and perils, so that He has both the knowledge and the power to protect us. While the Master may lead us along the path of suffering and sacrifice, it will be a road that He has trodden before us, it will be illumined by the light of His presence, and it will lead us home. In the midst of sorrow and grief Christ is often closest to us. Our Lord found rest and peace in the home of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, and honoured them with His friendship. Why did sickness and death enter there? Martha attributed her brother's passing to Christ's absence. But the Lord was absent in body that He might reveal to them His power and bring a great blessing, and that, as a result of the raising of Lazarus, many might believe in Him. Some of us are afflicted with sickness, others are mourning the loss of loved ones, but the Lord means this experience to draw us closer to Himself.

Fraught with much comfort is also the permanent nature of Christ's presence. "I am with you *always*", or, as the Greek translates the Hebrew idiom, *pásas tás hēméras*, that is "all the days". Weymouth renders it, "day by day". Only Christ could make the promise of unbroken continued fellowship, for only divine power could keep such a pledge. Christ has been with His Church throughout the centuries, in all the fierce persecutions of the past, and He is fulfilling His promise to-day, when a new paganism, in the form of the totalitarian state, dares to say, "Thou shalt have no God but Caesar". But even as His presence was with Paul dying under Nero, so to-day it comforts and sustains a Niemoeller languishing in a Nazi concentration camp. The duration of the promise, "unto the end of the world", literally, "the completion of the age", presages His victory. Christ began this age with His first advent and will bring it to a close by His Second Coming.

## II. OUR OBLIGATION

If Christ is present with us, it is because He has a definite purpose for our lives. He wishes us to live with Him, to draw close to Him in both sorrow and joy, in want and in plenty. This communion with Christ is not to result in a withdrawal from the realities of this present world, in escape, as was sought by the monks and nuns of the Middle Ages. Rather is it to empower us to achieve victory over the manifold perplexities and difficulties that might otherwise overwhelm us. But achievement may have for the Christian a meaning far removed from the "success" sought by the world. The greatest achievement is that of a Christlike spirit. Had the world seen more of Christ in the lives of Christians "in good standing" in their churches, no Jewish leader could have brought the indictment, "Christendom has hidden the face of Christ from us", as Rabbi Wise in New York has done.

A life with Christ will result in a life for Christ. "He that abideth in me, and I in Him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing" (John xv. 5). William Borden of Yale left behind in America all that wealth and culture could give to take the gospel to the Mohammedans of western China, a field he chose because it was reputedly the most difficult known to modern missions. While studying Arabic in Cairo, he was stricken with fever and died. From the human point of view, that spelled the utter failure of his life's purpose. But his Christlike character was achievement. His mother had the story of his life translated and distributed among the Chinese Moslems he so longed to reach. That story has been wonderfully used of the Lord in reaching these people. Because he abode with the Master, William Borden's life is bearing fruit among a people he never saw, half a world away.

Have you claimed His promise, "I am with you always, even unto the end of the world", and does your life bear fruit for Him?

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