

# Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit

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A PRESENT HELPER.

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## A Sermon

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DELIVERED BY

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“I am with thee.”—Acts xviii. 10.

THE Apostle Paul was about to be placed in imminent peril. He was to be brought before the Roman governor Gallio. The Jews, rank and rabble, were hopeful that they would get him condemned to death. In this threatening crisis the Lord Jesus would give him a word of comfort to strengthen him, that his courage might not fail. The best, the most assuring word that the Saviour could speak to his servant was this, “I am with thee.” Nothing in heaven or earth could be more fitted to cheer his tried spirit. To know that Jesus was with him, approving, supporting, defending him, was a safeguard against fear. Years afterwards, when Paul had to stand before the Roman emperor, whose will was absolute, whose fiat could have put him to instant death, he had no man who dare stand by him. A poor despised servant of a despised Master, he was not then cast down or disheartened, for he says, “Nevertheless, the Lord stood by me.” Under the worst circumstances, true Christians find the richest comfort if they do but know that Jesus is with them. When our Lord went away to heaven, and left his disciples on earth, they were like a flock of sheep surrounded with wolves. Just then he would surely give them, as a parting word, the tenderest and the most encouraging sentence that could fall from his lips. What think you was that word? Why, one of his farewell words was this, “*Lo, I am with you always*”—a dear and blessed legacy to his children who are still in banishment below. And when John, in Patmos, had a vision of Jesus in his glory, where, think you, did he see him? Did he see

him as standing before the throne, or in any position of glory? Yes, he did; but first of all he says, "I saw him walking amongst the golden candlesticks." Now, he tells us, these golden candelabra represented the churches, and Jesus Christ was pictured even as a glorified Saviour, holding the seven stars in his right hand, and walking among the seven golden candlesticks. Hence I gather that the truest comfort of the Church is for Christ to be with us, and that one of the highest joys of Jesus is to be with his people.

I shall ask you now to consider the grateful fact that Jesus is with believers. The words, "I am with thee," may be taken in three ways, and the three must be combined to get the whole of their sense.

"I am with thee." This implies his *presence*. That would not be enough; a person is not with us if he is merely in the same place as a spectator. "I am with thee" expresses his *sympathy*. He is not here as a stranger; but he is here feeling for us, compassionating with us. "I am with thee" has a yet deeper significance. It involves *succour*. He is working with thee—on the same side—exerting his power in connection with thine. Put the three together, and you get presence, sympathy, co-operation, to interpret the meaning. We will take the three words, and oh! as we take them, may we realise them as our own. The words "I am with thee" leave no doubt of:—

#### I. THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST.

Believer, Jesus Christ's spiritual and most real presence is with you. This should greatly comfort you, because it is the presence of One whom you dearly love, and who reciprocates that affection with an accord so intimate that every hope or fear you feel is reflected in his breast. His heart beats true to you. I might almost say his nerves vibrate in sympathy with you. Oh! how it calms the mind in the midst of difficulty or danger, if we have near us, by our side, one toward whom our heart goes forth, and from whom a kindred yearning comes back! The child sleeps sweetly when it is with its mother, watched and tended by her quick eye and ready hand. The loneliest part of the pilgrim's road is relieved of its tediousness and its terror when some dear companion is with him, in whose fellowship he can agree, upon whose arm he may lean, and whose constancy he can trust to share any danger. A sprightly word, a kindly look, a brotherly act, seem like timely aid to us all when we are jaded, footsore, out of our course, and out of spirits. Ah! then, you could not have a sweeter friend with you than you have in Jesus. The society of brother or sister, husband or wife, parent or guardian, can never equal the hallowed peace of communion with Jesus, who loved you, lived for you, died for you, lives for you still, gives his whole heart to you, and only asks that you give your heart to him in return.

Still more precious does this presence of Jesus become when we think how ennobling it is. Some people talk all their life long of having been once in the society of some great person. That is,

indeed, a foolish pride, very empty. But to have been in the society of Jesus is worthy to be remembered, deserving to be recorded, and most desirable to be repeated. I reckon that the angels would look more respectfully towards a man who has had communion with Jesus than they would at a council of kings and emperors, or a parliament of princes and peers. We are made priests and kings who enter into fellowship with our great High Priest and King. His glory overshadows us. Though he is transfigured in a way we are not, yet we participate somewhat in his honours now, and we shall be altogether partakers of his glory by-and-bye. "I am with thee," then, is the voice of a tender friend, and one of a superior nature, who confers dignity by his companionship.

This—"I am with thee"—is an enlivening cry. It inspirits a man, quickens his pulse, and enables him to bid defiance to danger. We remember when Paul was in the ship tossed with tempest, what consternation seized all persons on board. So much were they discouraged that they would probably have been unable to do anything for their own rescue had not Paul, with the coolness of faith, chided their panic, given them counsel, and bidden them to eat, for, as he said, "this is for your health." After long fasting, he saw the necessity of taking refreshment. And he led the way. He took break, gave thanks to God in the presence of them all, then broke the bread, and himself began to eat. This manly fortitude, this moral courage of the Apostle, repressed the general agitation and nerved them all with fresh hope, insomuch that they were all of good cheer, and they also took some food. This was the turning point in their fortune; and, in the issue, they everyone came safe to land. Thus full often has it been in the time of battle. When the troops have been ready to flee, one able man has stood like a rock, has made caution look like cowardice by his own defiance of danger, has given a word which has made every soldier feel himself a hero, lion-hearted, not milk-livered. So the battle has been turned. "I am with thee," then, O Christian, is the voice of One whose presence fills thy soul with dauntless courage. No fear when Jesus is near. None can be defeated who have him to bring them succour. The presence of Christ with us puts an end to morbid apprehension and ghastly cowardice.

When we are told that Jesus is with us, we remember that his is a presence which causes intense delight. We have seen men with money, who were not happy; we have seen men with honour, who were not happy; we have seen persons in power, with the command of empires, yet they were not happy; but we never saw, and never shall see, the individual who hath Jesus with him, that is not happy. To be near him, to have him with us, is to have our fears relieved, our griefs soothed, our wounds healed, and all our sorrows turned into joy. One drop of Jesus' love would turn the whole sea sweet. Yea, though the bitterness within you seem to have penetrated your whole being, let but Jesus whisper, "Thou art mine

and I am thine," and the bitterness would turn to honey at that one single word. Only a glimpse from Jesus' eye, and the darkness is turned to noon-day. Only one word from Jesus' lips, and the tempest that raged becomes calm, and the ruffled sea is still. "I am with thee" bespeaks the presence then of One who brings you delight.

And this presence, as I have already hinted, transforms the soul. When Jesus is with us, he makes us like himself. He that lives near to Jesus becomes so Jesus-like, that others "take knowledge of him that he has been with Jesus." Put these thoughts together, and you will see how infinitely desirable and how exquisitely satisfactory the company of Christ is. But, ah! my words cannot tell you, though I had the tongue of the orator or the sweeter strains of the poet. Yea, the inspiration of the muse would fail to acquaint you with it. You must know it for yourself, or else you can never realise how transporting these words are—"I am with thee"—Jesus present with his own people.

Now some of you know, by a happy experience, times and seasons when Jesus is specially present with his people. I trust we have often found him so at the hour of prayer. Rising in the morning, it is sweet to find in those few minutes we give to God before we see the face of man, that, like the Psalmist, we can say, "When I am awake I am still with thee." Then at nightfall, when the day's work is over, and we are about to lie down and rest, it is good to find, as we kneel before him once again, that Jesus is there! And, ah! some of us have proved what it is in the watches of the night to have his sweetest company. When darkness compasseth us, and silence awes us, and sleep has deserted us, our soul has said, "Now will I speak with my Beloved," and we have always found him awake. A sigh has reached his ears; the fluttering of an unfledged prayer; a desire after him has brought him near to our side, close to our couch, present to our heart. We have thanked God for sleeplessness, when we have had our beloved Master talking with us and indulging us with a blessed sense of communion. And, oh! how near Jesus is to his people when they are passing through the stage of penitential love. I hope you often get there, when sensitive to your own imperfection and unworthiness before God, you are abased and humbled, yet looking up at the same moment to that dear cross on which he bled, because we sinned, you see your pardon and acceptance written in crimson lines on the fair body of the dying Saviour. I do not know that I have ever more tenderly felt the presence of Jesus than when, while my heart has been broken with a sense of my own worthlessness and insignificance, I have confidently fled for refuge to the hope that is set before me in the finished sacrifice and the perfect redemption that Christ has accomplished.

But, beloved, Jesus is present to us not only in our acts of penitence and devotion, but he is present with his people in the battle of life. Yes, he will go with you to the workshop. The street

is not too common for him to tread side by side with you. Jesus can stand with you in the market. You can as truly maintain fellowship with Christ in your buying and your selling, if your commerce with the world is conducted in the fear of the Lord, as in your praying and your reading, which are of small account, unless "ye have an unction from the Holy One." No kind of labour will ever make Christ take an aversion to you, however humble your toil, however poor the chamber in which that toil is carried on, or however rough may be the garb in which you have to earn your daily bread. Jesus cares not for these. 'Tis your soul he looks for; and if you hunger and thirst for him, he will go with you into the lowliest places, and you shall find it true, "I, I am with thee."

More especially, beloved friends, in the ordinances of God's house, may we look for the refreshment of the Lord's presence. Oh! what a beloved place this Tabernacle is when Jesus is here, manifestly in our midst, and witnessed by many hearts. It would be a poor meeting-house if only the minister and the congregation, however large, were congregated together within its walls. Poor would it be, notwithstanding all the accessories of worship, yea, even with the bread and the wine, the elements of the communion supper, spread in rich abundance, without the Lord himself were here to bless the feast and feed the communicants. But, ah! when the King sits at his table, then our spikenard giveth forth a sweet smell, and our heart is merry within us, even as the angels' that are before the throne of God. Does he not come to you as ye sit in the pews, beloved, and say to you, "I am with thee"? and when ye gather yourselves together to partake of the communion supper, is he not with you there? Join ye in the solemn hymn, or do ye unite in earnest prayer? What is it that makes the service enlivening, and elevating, instructive and fruitful, but the consciousness of his presence—this same "I am with thee."

Yes, and when the time shall come for you to have done with ordinances—when the preacher's voice shall no more reach your ear; when the melody of sacred song shall cease to entrance your senses; when you have joined here below for the last time in the fellowship of the Supper of the Lord; for you must bear the clammy sweat upon your brow, and wear the mortal paleness on your cheeks, as you are about to pass through what they call the "gate of tears"—e'en then you shall find it a gate of endless joy, because this shall be true to your experience in the highest sense, "I am with thee." Fear not the darkness; dread not the loose pains, shrink not from the weakness, tremble not at the advent of the grim King of Terrors. "I am with thee" will change the hue of that affliction, and when thou art very ill make thee say that all is well.

Oh! if my Lord would come and meet me, my soul would stretch her wings in haste, fly swiftly through death's iron gate, nor feel affrighted as she passed. So it shall be with you. I have but skimmed the surface of this first point—the *presence* of Christ—"I

am with thee." Do not any of you skim it. Go into the depths and enjoy it, beloved. The words still further express:—

## II. SYMPATHY.

Remember that Christ in every deed feels at his heart the sorrows of his people. Are they in the furnace; he walks the fire with them. Are they in the rivers; he says, "When thou passest through the rivers, I will be with thee." And this is grounded upon the precious doctrine of vital union. Every believer is livingly one with Jesus. Jesus is the head, and the believer is a member of the one mystical body. Now you see, whenever a member suffers, the head must suffer, not only because the head wills to suffer, but because of necessity; if there be a vital union, there must be a real sympathy. Let this be, then, a matter of faith with us. If I have believed in Jesus unto everlasting life, Jesus is one with me as my head, and he must—whether I apprehend it or not at the time—he must be in sympathy with me. This he shows by the tender pity he has for his people. Do not think he is ever hard or unfeeling towards his poor, his afflicted, his depressed disciples. Nay, brethren, the heart of Jesus is full of tenderness; his bowels melt with love, as he often proves by the sweet converse he has with them. Though he may leave the strong sometimes to bear for awhile the hardships, and grapple, as it were, alone with the troubles of life, he will not leave his tried and tempted ones, or suffer them to faint by the way. Like a mother that lets her full-grown boy alone to shift for himself, but will scarce go out of doors while the baby is ill, so will he watch over them. And has not Jesus been very, very watchful over us in times of pain, and weakness, and serious apprehension? You know he has. He has kept his best succour till we had got into our worst plight. When we had spent all and exhausted every resource, then he has come and brought himself to our aid, and we found him our all in all. Oh! what true sympathy this is! "A friend in need is a friend indeed." He treats us better as we grow worse. This is just the friend we want. One with us by vital union, he proves his oneness by his tenderness. Now, beloved, if this be so, the very first sympathy you ought to seek in any time of trouble is that of Jesus. You have not always gone promptly to him. You have been far more ready to run off to some kinsman or neighbour, and ask counsel or succour of an earthly helper. What would you think of a wife—would you think she had much genuine confidence, much good understanding, much true love to her husband, if, on any sudden exigence or anxiety, she left him, fled from her home, crossed the road, entered another person's house, and poured into another man's ears the story of her plaint or her peril? You would feel convinced that there was a want of mutual love and reciprocal fellowship. And should it ever be that your soul goes after some poor mortal for consolation, when the beloved Bridegroom of your spirit can afford you all you want, to ask advice? it is often a helpful means, but go first to Jesus. Tell him all: pour out your

heart before him. He is with you. Oh! will you neglect One who is with you, and play him so ill a part as to seek another's help when he is ready to give you all his help—his sympathising help in time of need? The sympathy of Jesus will, in all probability, be most clearly manifested and most richly enjoyed by you at such times as you are most in need of it. Thus, when you are persecuted for his sake, he will not hide his face from you. We are not likely to be burnt at the stake, or even cast into prison for the profession of his name in these days of civil and religious liberty; but there are divers tortures from which our fine sensibility shrinks, such as household persecutions. Little petty spite is often vented upon believers for Jesus Christ's sake. Now do not think a strange thing has happened to you. Take it as a natural consequence of not being of the world; and then hear the Saviour say, "I am with thee. I am reproached in thy reproach: I am scorned in the scorn that is cast on thee." Paul persecuted *Jesus* when he thought he had only persecuted some poor Jews. And the enemy persecutes Jesus when he persecutes a believer. "I am with thee," then. Will you not say, "Lord, I will bear it for thy sake, and in thy company. Ay, if it were a thousand times worse, I would feel honoured to endure it, if thou art there"? You will find him with you sympathetically in your common sorrows. Remember, Jesus does not look for extraordinary occasions in which to sympathise with his people, though he will do it peculiarly then. But at all other times he is a faithful feeling friend. "Jesus wept." It was at the death of Lazarus. Lazarus was only an ordinary saint—an ordinary believer. There was nothing so remarkable about his death as to make it exceptional. Think not for a moment that in the loss you have sustained Jesus will keep aloof. With the grief that now weighs down your spirit he fully sympathises. In the griefs which are common to mankind, he bears you company. But if you should ever come into deeper waters—if you should have to cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" you shall hear Jesus then say still, "I am with thee," for he knows what strong temptations mean, and deep depressions and despondences that border on despair. He has passed through all, that as the Captain of our salvation he might be made "perfect through suffering." "Tempted in all points like as we are," there is no grief in which Jesus is not near to us; we have but to open the eye of faith, and we shall see him with us, even in the worst extremities of grief and pain. "I am with thee in sympathy." This shall be found anywhere and everywhere true by the believer—ay, even in death itself, for Jesus died. He knows the death sweat, for he sweat, as it were, great drops of blood. He knows the fever, for he said, "I thirst." He knows the fainting, the languishing, for he said, "I am poured out like water; I am brought into the dust of death." He knows death in its severest form. He died as you will not die. Under the divine displeasure he passed away, but you shall have the light of the divine countenance amidst the

shades of death. Fear not, therefore, that Jesus will forsake you. You have Jesu's sympathy. I want you to feel that. Well do I know myself what a precious thing sympathy is. A little child's sympathy will do you good. "Mother," said a little girl, "I do not know why Mrs. So-and-so wants me to go into her house so often, but she told me, when I came home to-night, to be sure and go to-morrow, for I comforted her so, now her husband was dead; and do you know, mother, all I do is, when she cries, I put my face against hers and I cry too; and she says that comforts her." And so it does. It is just that. We are not alone. "Somebody—somebody cares for me." We shall never despair while we feel that is true. Now there may be somebody here to-night who is alone in London—and you had better be alone in the deserts of Sahara. To be alone in London is to be alone indeed. And you are thinking, "Nobody cares for me." But if thou wilt take Christ to be thy friend—if thou trustest in him—Jesus will care for thee, and he will surely help thee; for he is not one of those who will put you off by saying, "Be ye warmed and be ye filled." He will practically show his love to you, and you shall yet rejoice that Jesus is with you, and you are not alone, though you seem alone." There I leave that second point, praying that you may all know the sympathy of Jesus. Once more:—

III. CO-OPERATION is implied in the words "I am with thee." This was just what Paul wanted. He had come down to the city to preach, and God said to him, "I have much people in this city: I am with thee." So Paul went to his preaching with a cheerful heart, for he felt that if the Lord was with him, it was good to preach. With good sowing, there would be good reaping. Now listen, worker—worker for God—and see if there be not music for thine ear in this thought. Jesus co-operates with thee. How so? Why, he commands providence. All things are ordered according to his will. The Father hath given all power into the hands of Jesus. He regulates the fields of providence, that they may produce the best results for you. Go on, confidently, then. All things are favourable to you. As Mahomet said, in his way, to his followers, "Swiftly on to the battle, and win! I can hear the trampings of the angel Gabriel's horse as he rides into the thick of the battle to help you." They believed it, and were comforted. What he said in falsehood, Jesus may say in truth—"I am with you." You can hear the footfalls of the Prince Emmanuel. His power is ruling all creation, to produce the grand result of his glory in the salvation of souls. "I am with you"; that is, "I will prepare human hearts for your message." You that talk to others will often find others ready to be talked to. It is a cheering thought to the preacher, that he has always a picked congregation, selected by divine providence, that out of them divine grace may make a further selection. They are prepared. As the rain and the wind and the frost will prepare the clods for the plough and the seed, so do God's providence and the work of grace prepare men's hearts

for the gospel. "I am with you." Moreover, worker, Jesus is with you, helping you. He will suggest suitable thoughts; he will give you right arguments; he will often guide you to fitting words. Only trust him, and when you go about his business, the Holy Spirit shall be your strength. He will be with you to back up the word you utter, by the power of the Holy Ghost going with it to convince men that what you say is God's Word to them. Fear not, therefore. If the converting of souls devolved upon you, it would never be done. If a nation had to be reformed, and the whole of another nation had to do it, it would never be achieved; but the Spirit of the Lord is not straitened, and what he wills to do he can accomplish, and none can say him nay.

Lastly. O earnest worker, Christ is with you, to accept your service. Nobody has taken any notice of you lately. You have gone plodding on at your work, with not a creature to help, and none to praise. Even your friend who used sometimes to give you a nod of approbation, appears not to have observed you lately. Never mind! never mind! No servant that is deeply absorbed in his work cares much about what other servants may say about him by way of commendation; but if his master comes along, and says, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" that is what he wants to cheer him. Some people will be overhauling your character; I know they do mine; and they are extremely welcome, for I care not as much for their opinion as for the barking of dogs in the streets. If my Master were angry with me, I should mind it; but they are no masters of mine, and they may say what they like. My Master smile, all the world may frown; it does not signify. But if my Master frowned, then if all said, "Well done!" it is but a poor, poor recompense to me. Servant of God, be this, to your joy. "I am with thee," says Jesus, "to see what thou doing—to accept and take thy will for the deed full often—to reach thy real motives where men misconstrue them. I am with thee. Therefore, go on thy way." Sunday School teachers, tract distributors, or whatever thou mayest happen to be—in one word, beloved child of God, seeking to serve Jesus—take, then, this afresh from Jesus' lips, "I am with thee," and go thy way, in the power of this thy might, to serve thy Lord without weariness, till he shall say, "Come up higher." "I am with thee."

Oh! you that have not any Saviour to be with you, I do pity you; but I would say this word to you: he is still to be had. There is still:—

"Life in a look at the Crucified One."

Jesus still has blood in which to wash the guilty—still has room in his heart for needy sinners, and the way to have Jesus for thy Saviour is to trust him simply, and to rely on him implicitly. May God grant thee grace to do this, for his mercy's sake! Amen.