

FOUR CHOICE SENTENCES

NO. 1630

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON THURSDAY EVENING, FEBRUARY 3, 1881
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

MY discourse this evening will scarcely be a sermon—it will be an expository rather of the life and experience of Jacob upon one point. In order to bring it out I shall need four texts, but lest you should let any one of them slip, I will give them to you one at a time.

I. First, turn to the twenty-eighth chapter of Genesis, at the fifteenth verse, and read of PRESENT BLESSING. The Lord said to His servant Jacob,

“Behold, I am with thee.”

Jacob was the inheritor of a great blessing from his fathers, for this sentence was spoken in connection with the following words, “I am the Lord GOD of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac.” It is an inexpressible privilege, dear friends, to be able to look back to father and grandfather, and perhaps farther still, and to say, “We come of a house which has served the Lord as far back as history can inform us.” Descended from Christians, we have a greater honor than being descended from princes. There is no heraldry like the heraldry of the saints.

Jacob might be very thankful that, as God had blessed Abraham, and had blessed Isaac, so He blessed him in the same way, speaking to him in the same terms as He had spoken to them, for He had expressly said to each of them, “I am with thee.”

Are any of you the children of godly parents, and has the Lord called you by His grace? Then bless His name, and take heed that you do nothing to dishonor an estate so honorable. Try and maintain, as long as you live, the good repute which in infinite love God has put upon your household.

Are you, however, a child of godly parents and not yet converted? I would warn you against putting the slightest reliance upon your birth, for remember, if Isaac was the child of Abraham, so also was Ishmael—but no blessing came to Ishmael of a spiritual kind.

It is in vain to be born of blood, or of the will of the flesh. We must be born again from above. God is sovereign, He is not bound to dispense His favors from father to son. And when He does so, we are to admire His grace. Do not imagine that there is such a thing as hereditary piety—it must be wrought in each individual by the selfsame Spirit.

Still, it is one of the highest privileges that God has ever been pleased to grant to me that I can rejoice in a father and a grandfather who trained me in the fear of God. And I congratulate every young person who has such a pedigree. God bless you. Be not satisfied unless you yourself obtain such mercy as God gave to your ancestors, and hear the Lord saying, “I am with thee.”

This mercy was brought home to Jacob at a time when he greatly needed it. He had just left his father’s house, and he felt himself alone. He was coming into special trial, and then it was that he received a fuller understanding of the privilege which God had in store for him. Let me read the words to you—“I am with thee.”

I have tried to think them out, that I might speak concerning them to you, but they are too full. I defy anybody to measure their height and depth, their length and breadth. That God should give to Jacob bread to eat and raiment to put on was much—but that is nothing compared with, “I am with thee.” That God should send His angel with Jacob to protect Him would have been much—but it is nothing compared with, “I am with thee.”

This includes countless blessings, but it is in itself a great deal more than all the blessings we can conceive of. There are many fruits that come of it, but the tree that yields them is better than the fruit. “I am with thee.” Will God in very deed dwell with men upon earth? Will God walk with a man, and speak with him?

“LORD, what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?” And yet He says, “I am with thee.” You are in Your courts above, and You make heaven, heaven by Your presence, and yet You say, “I am with *thee*.” What more could You say to a seraph than this—“I am with thee”?

Why, when God is with a man, there is a familiarity of condescension that is altogether unspeakable—it *insures an infinite love*. “I am with thee.” God will not dwell with those He hates. He puts away the wicked of the earth like dross. He says to them, “Depart, I never knew you.” But to each one of His people He says, “I know thee by thy name; thou art Mine. And more than that, I am with thee.” As a man delights to be with a friend, so are the delights of Christ with the sons of men, whom He has chosen and redeemed with blood.

“I am with thee”—*it means practical help*. Whatever we undertake, God is with us in the undertaking. Whatever we endure, God is with us in the enduring. Whithersoever we wander, God is with us in our wandering.

“If God be for us, who can be against us?” If God be with us, can we ever be exiled or banished? If God be with us, what can we not do? If God be with us, what can we not endure? Well said the apostle, as if answering that question, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” “I am with thee.”

Come, brother or sister, if you would get the fullness of this privilege, believe that God is near you now—near to you as he that sits at your side. Nay, nearer, for He is so with you as to be in you. And do you know that His whole Godhead is with you? “I am with *thee*,” as if there were not another—the whole Godhead is with *thee*.

You have not to cry aloud like Baal’s priests, or cut yourself with knives, that you may attract His eye, for He says, “I am with thee.” Your sighs He hears. Your tears He puts into His bottle. “I am with thee.”

And you have not His presence only, but *His sympathy*. He means, I am feeling with you, suffering with you. If there be a load, I bear it with you. If there be work to do, I will work with you. You are workers together with God.

Beloved, said I not rightly that I can never open up all this to you? Roll it under your tongue as a sweet morsel, and if it go down into your inward parts it shall not be bitter, but sweeter still. “I am with thee.” Oh, the richness of this special blessing!

How precious it must have seemed as it came to Jacob in that den of a place, where he lay with the hedges for his curtains, the heavens for his canopy, the earth for his bed, stones for his pillow, and God for his companion.

“I am with thee. Tomorrow, when you shall open your eyes, you will look back to the west and say, ‘I have left my father’s house and my mother, Rebecca, behind me,’ and the tears will be in your eyes. And you will look to the east and say, ‘I am going to the house of my mother’s kindred, and I know them not, save that I have heard concerning Uncle Laban that he is hard and grasping. And I know not how he will receive me.’”

But is not that a precious thing to start upon a journey with—“I am with thee”—I, the Ever-Blessed? Though your mother is not with you, “I am with thee.” Is there any young friend here who is leaving home? Are you going away for the first time, and do you feel sad? Or are you about to emigrate to a distant country, and does your heart feel heavy? Do not go at all till you can get a hold of this—“I am with thee.”

Say unto the Lord, “If thy Spirit go not with me, carry me not up from hence.” Wait till He gives the answer, “My Spirit shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.” This ought to be the blessing of your opening life, “I am with thee.” Is God with you tonight? Can God be with you?

Some come to service after having quarreled with their wives and families. God is not with them. People who are following ill trades, and living ill lives, and rejecting the Gospel—God cannot be with them. “Can two walk together except they be agreed?” If you are a believer in Christ, and the Spirit of God has produced in you the true fruits of the Spirit, then you may say, “He is with me,” but not else.

Now turn to the thirty-first chapter of Genesis, at the third verse, and read these words,

“I will be with thee.”

We will call this FUTURE BLESSING. It is almost unnecessary to take this second text, for if it is written, “I am with thee,” you may depend upon it that He *will be* with us, for God does not forsake His people.

Some people believe in a God who loves today and hates tomorrow, who pardons sin and yet afterwards condemns. Such a God is not my God. My God is unchangeable.

***“Whom once He loves He never leaves,
But loves them to the end.”***

“I am God; I change not: therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.”

Poor Jacob had been living with Laban, and had passed through many messes and troubles, and it was time that he should receive the word of blessing over again. We read that, “Jacob beheld the countenance of Laban, and, behold, it was not toward him as before.” He had begun to take root in the worldling’s portion, and was willing to stop away from the promised land, and build up a family among his worldly connections.

But the Lord practically said to him, “This is not your rest.” Laban’s sons begin to growl as they see how their brother-in-law’s flocks have increased, and therefore the time has come for Jacob to go. Jacob does not like it. He never did like moving. Family connections, a host of children, and a mighty crowd of cattle, made a removal a great undertaking.

Then the Lord said to him, “I will be with thee.” As much as to say, “I will be more with you in Canaan than I ever have been in this place, which is not the land of promise. I will give you My special presence if you will get away into the place of the separated life, and walk with Me as your father Isaac did.”

It was very sweet many years ago to some of us to hear the Lord say, “I am with thee,” and to know that it was true. For, “Truly, our fellowship was with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.” But it may at this hour be very opportune if the Lord should renew His promise to us by saying, “I will be with thee.”

You are commencing a new form of life. You are entering on new trials. You are undertaking new duties, and now comes in the new promise, “I will be with thee.” If those upon whom you had a right to rely have turned against you, if those who were really indebted to you have become envious of you—“yet, nevertheless,” says God—“I will be with thee.”

Jacob’s journey was to be a very venturesome one. He knew that Laban would not like it, and probably would pursue him. But God says, “Go, and I will be with thee.” He knew also that his brother Esau would be pretty sure to take vengeance upon him for the sorry trick he had played on him, and that touched his conscience, and he feared and trembled. But God said, “I will be with thee.”

The plainest road in the world is wrong if God does not bid us take it. And the roughest and most unpromising way will turn out to be safe and right if God commands our journey. Jonah thought it was

all right to go to Tarshish. But God was not with him, and he came back by a route which he never expected to follow.

If you go your own road, I wish you may be fortunate enough to meet with as good a return conveyance as Jonah did, for you will certainly have to come back. But if the road be never so rough, if it is God's road, you shall run over it like a young roe. God will make your feet like hinds' feet and you shall tread upon your high places. "Thy shoes shall be iron and brass; and as thy days, so shall thy strength be."

Only, mind that you follow a road in which God can be with you, for there are some ways in which God will never be found. He cannot walk in the ways of sin, or worldliness, or self-seeking—if we choose these, we must go alone.

See, then, the promised mercy, and rejoice in it. Go forward, dear child of God, if the pillar of cloud is moving, without the slightest hesitancy, and let this be your joy and comfort—"Certainly, I will be with thee. In all places whithersoever thou goest, I will be with thee."

II. I need to go a step farther, and come, in the third place, to EXPERIENCED BLESSINGS.

Let us look at Jacob's experience. Did Jacob find God to be with him? He had a long life and a tried one. He was a man that knew a great deal, and men that know a great deal are doubly likely to meet with great trouble. Cunning, wise, crafty, prudent, self-reliant people frequently flounder out of one slough into another.

Above all things, I should dread being partner with a man that is overly wise, for such men either make fools of themselves, or else they have to sleep with one eye open. Jacob's cunning was an injury to him in the long run.

Abraham was simple as a child. He believed God, and never stooped to a trick, and therefore his life was a noble one. Jacob was a very wise person, the kind of gentleman to have made a financier, or the manager of a company. He was a rare man of business.

In fact, he was the father of the Jews, and that is saying a great deal. Yet because of his sharpness, he was often robbed. And through his cunning he was overreached. And he did not, after all, so much enjoy life, and was neither so rich nor so happy as his simple-minded grandfather Abraham.

We will, however, hear what Jacob has to say about these two gracious words of God, "I am with thee," and "I will be with thee." Turn to the thirty-first chapter again, and read the fifth verse. Up to as far as the time that he was about to leave Laban, he says,

"The God of my father hath been with me."

I have read that testimony with great joy. I thought of Jacob thus—Well, you certainly were not eminent for grace while with Laban. You were plotting and scheming—you against Laban and Laban against you—and yet your witness is, "The God of my father hath been with me."

This is all the more encouraging as coming from you. Jacob seems to say of his God—It was He that gave me my wife and my children. It was He that prospered me in the teeth of those who tried to rob me. The God of my father hath been with me, notwithstanding all my shortcomings.

I trust that some of you can bear the like witness. Though you have not been all that you could wish in the Christian life, yet you can say, "The God of my father hath been with me."

Now, we will look at him a little further on, in the thirty-fifth chapter and the third verse. There we shall find him saying—"Let us arise, and go up to Bethel; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, *and was with me in the way which I went.*"

As I have already said, he left Laban's house, and it was a very venturesome journey, but God was with him. Jacob tells us that it was so. Poor Jacob was full of fear when he heard that Esau was coming to meet him. You can see that by the way in which he divided his flocks and his herds—and set apart so large a present for Esau.

But God does not leave His people because of their fears. I am so thankful for that. If He were to cast us off because of our unbelief, is there one of us who would not have been cast off long ago?

There was Peter walking on the waters with a brave faith—was not Christ with him? Yes, or else he could not have stood on the wave at all. By and by his faith failed him, and down went Peter. But did Christ give him up and say, “You shall die. According to your unbelief shall it be unto you”? No, there is not such a word as that in the Bible. But it is written, “According to thy faith shall it be unto thee.” Jesus stretched out His hand and grasped sinking Peter, saying, “O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?”

So, though you may grieve the Lord by doubting and fearing, and though you ought to be ashamed of yourself for so doing, yet still, He will not forsake you. If there is faith in your heart, though it be but little, you shall have to say, in spite of your doubts and fears, “The Lord was with me in the days of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went.”

There was a night of wrestling with Jacob. His faith enabled him to draw near to God in mighty prayer, and his fear made him the more desperate and importunate. He said, “I will not let thee go except thou bless me.” Though he had to be importunate, yet it was not because God was against him, but because God was with him. For he that can exercise importunate prayer proves that God is with him strengthening him thus to supplicate. His wrestlings ended in his victory.

On that day, too, I have no doubt, Jacob was very much cast down, because he remembered his sin. He knew he had ill-treated Esau, and robbed him of the blessing. But for all that, he came with a repentant heart to submit himself before his brother, and to do what he could to please him. Because of this, God was with him.

Oh, in that day, dear child of God, when you remember your faults, and your heart is heavy, do not think that the Lord has left you. It is one token that He is with you—that He makes you confess your sin, and humble yourself before Him. Still believe in Him, still hear His Word, and you shall have to say, “He was with me in the way which I went.”

At the close of his life, we find Jacob more fully than ever confessing that the presence of God had been with him. I read you the passage where he wished that the God that had been with him might be with his grandsons in the same way—the forty-eighth chapter, at the fifteenth and sixteenth verses. “He blessed Joseph, and said, God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads.” There is his last testimony to the faithfulness of God.

He had lost Rachel—oh, how it stung his heart—but he says, “God redeemed me from all evil.” There had come a great famine in the land, but he says that God had fed him all his life long. He had lost Joseph, and that had been a great sorrow. But now, in looking back, he sees that even then God was redeeming him from all evil.

He said once, “Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and you will take Benjamin away; all these things are against me.” But now he eats his words, and says, “The LORD hath redeemed me from all evil.” He now believes that God had been always with him, had fed him always, and redeemed him always, and blessed him always.

Now, mark you, if you trust in God, this shall be your verdict at the close of life. When you come to die, you shall look back upon a life which has not been without its trials and its difficulties, but you shall bless God for it all—and if there is any one thing in life for which you will have to praise God more than for another, it will probably be that very event which seems darkest to you.

Did God ever do a better thing for Jacob than when He took Joseph away, and sent him to Egypt to preserve the whole family alive? It was the severest trial of the poor old man’s career, and yet the brightest blessing after all. Can you not believe it? Inside that hard-shelled nut there is the sweetest kernel that you have tasted. Rest assured of that.

Your Father's rumbling wagons have woke you out of sleep, and you are frightened by them, but they are loaded with ingots of gold. You have never been so rich as you will be after your great trouble shall have passed away.

III. It is time for me to conclude, and I do so by bringing before you, in the fourth place, one more word of blessing. We have had present blessing. We have had future blessing. We have had experienced blessing three times over. And now we go to TRANSMITTED BLESSING, for we find Jacob transmitting the blessing to his son and to his grandson. Read in the forty-eighth chapter, at the twenty-first verse,

“Behold I die: but God shall be with you.”

I commenced by noticing the blessing which passed on from Abraham to Isaac. And now we see that Jacob hands it on to Joseph, to Manasseh, and to Ephraim—“I die: but God shall be with you.”

Some of you perhaps are thinking, “We are getting near the end of life. We have children, but they are not all converted yet, and those that are, it may be, are dependent upon us—what will become of them?” Do you think God will leave your children? Cannot you trust them with Him?

What did your father do with his son? One after another the former generations have passed away, and the Lord has been faithful to their successors. Do you think He will not be faithful to those who come next? You have brought up your children in His fear. You have rested upon His name, and therefore you may say to them, “I die: but God shall be with you.”

The time will come when we who are ministers shall be taken away from our beloved work on earth, and we cannot help thinking about the dear friends who hang upon our lips and depend upon our ministry. It is well for us to look a little forward and say, “I die: but God shall be with you.”

My venerated predecessor, Dr. Rippon, many a time prayed for his successor. I am sure he did not know who his successor was to be, for I was born about the time when he was dying. But doubtless, I inherited that good man's prayers. I am sure I do. “I die,” the old man might have said, “but God shall be with you.”

The church at New Park Street thought it an awful thing for the old gentleman to die. But he would have been of no service to us if he had remained here forever. And so it will be by and by. People will say, “What will the Tabernacle people do if they lose their minister?” It will probably be the greatest of blessings when it happens. Many good men have clung to their places longer than they should have done—and have pulled down much that they had built up.

It is well when the Lord says to such, “Friend, come up higher.” We may look forward each one to leaving our class, or to leaving the church over which we watch, or to leaving the great work over which we preside, and we may say, “I die: but God shall be with you.” God is not limited to one minister or fifty ministers. When we are gone, God will be with you.

They used to say of our dear friend, George Muller, “What will become of the Orphanage when Mr. Muller is laid aside?” When I was speaking to him, he said to me, “That was a question which I felt George Muller had nothing to do with. God will use George Muller as long as He likes, and when He chooses to put him aside, He will use somebody else.”

And now, mark, George Muller is not at Bristol. I believe he is at this present moment preaching in America. He has been all over Europe preaching, and the Orphanage has had very little of his personal presence—and yet it has gone on without George Muller so far.

Such a fact tends to answer man's idle questions. Blessed be the everlasting God—if Abraham dies, there is Isaac. And if Isaac dies, there is Jacob. And if Jacob dies, there is Joseph. And if Joseph dies, Ephraim and Manasseh survive.

The Lord shall never lack a champion to bear His standard high among the sons of men. Only let us pray God to raise up more faithful ministers. That ought to be our prayer day and night. We have plenty of a sort, but, oh, for more that will weigh out sixteen ounces to the pound of Gospel in such a way that

people will receive it. We have too much of fine language, too much of florid eloquence, and too little full and plain Gospel preaching.

But God will keep up the apostolic succession, never fear for that. When Stephen is dying, Paul is not far off. When Elijah is taken up, he leaves his mantle behind him. “I die: but God shall be with you.” Take comfort, dear friends, and may His Spirit be with you, through Jesus Christ, His dear Son, whose name is “Emmanuel”—God with us.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—GENESIS 28

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—23 (Song III.), 681, 732

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.

THE PREACHER has often been requested by his friends to report himself to them during his absence, and he therefore begs to say that he has safely reached the South of France, and already feels refreshed by the change of scene, and by escaping from fog and frost into a balmy summer air. If pain is thus avoided, the mind invigorated, and life prolonged, the time is well-spent. Our hope is in the great “Preserver of men” that it will assuredly be so. The prayers of loving friends are asked that in retirement, nets may be mended in which many may afterwards be taken.