

Introduction

How many of you have a best friend? I have a best friend. His name is Jacob; he lives over 500 miles away. Jacob and I met at church camp over ten years ago and we’ve been friends ever since. We know just about everything about one another; we know what each other likes, what we don’t like. We’ve seen each other in the best of times and in the worst of times. Yet through the good, the bad, and the ugly, we’ve never been better friends than we are today.

Earlier this year, things were not going very well in my life; I felt very sad, afraid, and lonely. My friend Jacob told me he wanted me to visit him and his wife, so I packed my suitcase and spent many hours driving up to a crazy city called Portland. Well, one of the things Jacob knows about me is that I really like flowers. So after I arrived at his apartment, he and I went for a walk to a massive rose garden a few blocks away, with all the different colors you can think of. It was beautiful! We sat on a bench, surrounded by so many different smells, and he looked at me, put his arm around me, and said, “I’m so glad you’re here with me.”

He knew I was sad, afraid, and lonely, so he took me to see things he knew would make me happy; he took me to a place with smells he knew would help me relax, he put his arm around me to make me feel safe; he sat with me so I would know I’m not alone. I didn’t ask him to do these things; he did them because he loves me and knows me like only a best friend can.

It feels good when Jacob tells me he loves me at the end of our phone calls, but it’s even more special when I get to spend time with him—not just hearing his voice on the phone, but being with him. Being with someone you love; being with someone who loves you is powerful, because being with people we love and being with people who love us bring us great comfort, and this comfort is a wonderful gift from God.

Explaining the Verse

I want to encourage you today by telling you about one of my favorite Bible verses:

Fear not, for I am with you,

Be not dismayed, for I am your God,

I will strengthen you, I will help you,

I will hold you up with my righteous right hand. (Isa. 41:10)

Just like being with the people we love and being with the people who love us brings us comfort, so also when we remember that God is with us, we can face any fear we may have,

because when God is with us, our God defeats every fear. I’m sure most of you remember the beginning of COVID. We didn’t know very much about it; we didn’t know how dangerous it was at first, and this caused a lot of fear. During COVID, Isaiah 41:10 became one of the top ten verses people looked up. Why? Because when we are afraid, remembering that our God is with us brings us great comfort.

Be not afraid, because God is with us. Repeat after me: God is with me. I will not be afraid because... God is with me. Be not dismayed—this word means to be anxious or stressed or nervous. Be not dismayed, for the God of all creation is our God. Repeat after me: the God of all creation is my God. I will not be nervous because... the God of all creation is my God. Our God is not some being who doesn’t care about you and me; no, he is my God; he is your God. Our God is not floating in the air mysteriously somewhere out there. No, our God who rules over all creation is as close as possible to each of his children. God is with me; God is with you, and therefore we have absolutely no reason to be afraid of anything happening in this crazy world.

When we feel weak, our God who is with us strengthens us; when we feel helpless, our God who is with us gives us the help we need. Isaiah 41:10 tells us that our God does all this; our God holds us up with his righteous right hand. Later in the chapter, God calls his righteous right hand the Redeemer. God promised to send a righteous Redeemer to sit at his right hand; and it is at God’s right hand where he holds us up when we can’t stand on our own; it is the Savior who helps us when we feel helpless; it is the Messiah who strengthens us when we feel weak; it is Jesus who is “God with Us.”

Emmanuel is Important All Year

I know it’s not yet Christmastime, but raise your hand if you know what the word Emmanuel means? What does it mean? It means “God with Us.” We talk about Emmanuel at Christmastime because the Gospel of Matthew says this about the birth of Jesus:

Behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, you should not fear to receive Mary as your wife, for that which is in her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you will call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” All this happened so that what the Lord spoke through the prophet would be fulfilled, saying, “Behold, the virgin’s womb will hold and bear a son, and they will call his name Emmanuel,” which means God with us (Matt. 1:20-23)

Each Gospel writer portrays Jesus in a different way. The promise of Emmanuel is one of the most important things about Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew. One of the main ways Matthew describes Jesus is as God’s presence with us. For example, in the middle of Matthew, Jesus talks to his disciples about prayer and says this: *Wherever two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am with them* (Matt. 18:20).

And after his death and resurrection, Jesus prepared his disciples for his departure to sit at God’s right hand by giving his disciples the Great Commission: *All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, make disciples by going to all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all of what I commanded you. And behold, for all days until the end of the age, I am with you* (Matt. 28:18-20).

Jesus being “God with Us” is not just important at Christmastime. Jesus being “God with Us” is worth remembering, celebrating, and holding onto all year because “God with Us” is who Jesus is. At the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of his earthly life, Jesus always was and always will be “God with Us,” and this is good news for all of God’s children.

This is good news because it means every single child of God has absolutely no reason to be afraid. I will not be afraid because... God is with me. I will not be nervous because... the God of all creation is my God. This is good news because, as weak and helpless as we are, it means we are made strong through Jesus Christ. God will strengthen you, God will help you; God will hold you up with his righteous right hand. This is good news because it means through Jesus our Savior, every single child of God is never alone.

Conclusion // Gospel Presentation and Invitation

Jesus didn’t stay up in heaven looking down on us with hatred; instead, he saw your sins and he loved you so much that Jesus left heaven to become a human just like each one of you. He was born as a tiny baby. As he grew up, he learned about how the world was created to work; he learned how to be wise and obedient; he learned how to give himself up for others. As he grew older, his love, his compassion, and his mercy for weak and helpless people never went away. He cared for sick people and wanted them to be made well.

But the truest sickness of all is our sin, which separates us from God. For Jesus to succeed at being “God with Us,” he had to take away our sins so we would never again be separated from God. He took away our sins by living a righteous life; living the life that we fail to live; by dying

in our place the death that our sins deserve; and by coming back to life on the third day so that anyone who puts their faith in Jesus Christ will be a greatly loved child of God forever. We didn't ask Jesus to do these things for us; he did them because he loves us and knows what we need like only a true Friend does.

Do you believe in your heart that Jesus was raised from the dead? Have you submitted your life to Jesus? If you have, then these words from Isa. 41:10 are spoken by God directly to you: fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you; I will hold you up with my righteous right hand. This is true for every child of God no matter how young or old you are. If you believe in your heart that Jesus was raised from the dead and submit your life to him, then you are a greatly loved child of God.

But if you do not believe that Jesus rose from the dead and if you have not submitted your life to Jesus then I have to be honest with you that you are not a child of God and the comforting words of Isaiah 41:10 are not spoken to you. However, if you are not a child of God, but you want to be a child of God, I invite you to please talk to your teacher today. When you get back to class, tell your teacher, I want to be a child of God and I know that your teacher would love to tell you about the wonderful grace of God and welcome you into God's family as a child of God today.

No matter what comes your way or my way, remembering that Jesus is “God with Us” is a great comfort because if God is with us, then no evil can stand against us. Psalm 23 encourages us with these words: even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil because... God is with me. No evil can stand against us because Jesus, our Righteous Savior, who sits at God's right hand holds us up against anything that comes against us.

Children of God, when you feel nervous, God our Father will calm your nerves. Children of God, when you feel weak, Jesus our Savior will strengthen you. Children of God, when you feel helpless, the Holy Spirit will help you. Children of God, though sometimes we feel afraid, we have nothing to fear because our God is with us.

Prayer

Let's pray—Our heavenly Father, we thank you that you comfort us with your ever-so-close presence. When we are sad or afraid, help us to remember that you are with us. When our friends are sad or afraid, help us also to remind them that you are with us. We love you, Lord. In Jesus' name, amen.