

God With Us? Msg 1
In The Valley
Sermon preached by Dr. Rick Mandl
Eagle Rock Baptist Church
November 30 & December 1, 2019

OPENING VIDEO <https://skitguys.com/videos/god-with-us1>

Beginning a new series called **“God With Us”**

What we’re doing in this series is we’re looking at the power of the theological truth of **“INCARNATION.”**

What that term means is that ***God became flesh and dwelt among us.***

That God **IS** among us.

And so today as we launch into this message series about the presence of God, I want to start with the verse that we will with every single week.

It’s found in Matthew’s Gospel.

Matthew 1:23.

And even if you don’t remember the verse, you should remember the reference.

Matthew – One – Two - Three

But before I read that verse, I want to read the verse before it.

We begin in the book of Matthew in chapter 1 and verse 22 where we read these words. . . .

“All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord’s message through his prophet. . .” Matthew 1:22

“The all of this” is talking about the shepherds it’s talking about the STAR and the WISE MEN and HEROD. . .

It’s talking about MARY and JOSEPH and the BABY being born..

All of those things that we so closely associate with the Christmas story. . .

It says

“All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord’s message through his prophet. . .” Matthew 1:22

The prophet it’s talking about is ISAIAH

And his prophecy, recorded in Isaiah 7:14, seven centuries before Jesus was born was that . . .

“The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him

Immanuel, which means ‘God is with us.’” Matthew 1:23

The title for this message series is **God With Us.**

And for those of you who are followers of Christ, it is **easy to believe that God is with us when things are well.**

When you’re **on the mountaintop** it’s not hard to believe that God is with us.

Whenever you **get really good news**, when you **get a raise**,

When your **baby sleeps through the night** for the first time,

When you **get a parking spot** in the mall and it’s so close,

God is so good He gave me this parking spot!

It’s **easy to sense the presence of God** when things are going well and when you’re on the mountaintop.

But it’s **sometimes more difficult to sense His presence** when **you’re in the valley.**

When things **aren’t going the way you want them to**

When you get **bad news.**

When you’re **hurting.**

Maybe when **you feel a little bit alone.**

When you’re **worried**, or when you’re **afraid**, or when you’re **battling depression.**

This morning we’re talking about . . .

God With Us In The Valley

I like what Tim Keller says about valleys.

“In our culture we are very naïve about how to handle dark times. And if we are not prepared they will overthrow us when they happen.”

That’s why you need to know about what God says about valleys.

Because you and I are going to go through them.

Not because we’re bad,

Not because God hates us,

But simply because that is the way that life is.

And if you learn what God's Word says about valleys, you will be better prepared.

To start things off, let me ask you . . .

What's in Your Valley?

Maybe your valley is **LONELINESS**.

And we know that this time of year that pain just seems to get worse.

HOLIDAYS, if you take your cue from the Hallmark movies are supposed to be all about family, and togetherness, and love and warmth and celebration.

And that can just amplify the pain for anyone who is deprived of those things that others are celebrating. . .

Maybe your valley is a **HEALTH ISSUE**

Or a **FAMILY ISSUE**

It can be **PARENTS**

It can be **KIDS**

It can be a **MARRIAGE**

It can be **SIBLINGS**

SCHOOL-RELATED

WORK-RELATED

MONEY-PROBLEMS

DEPRESSION

Maybe your valley is **STRESS**

Maybe I didn't name your valley

Or maybe you're in that place where **your last valley is behind you and your next valley has yet to appear.**

And what's interesting to me is so often, **much of your life can be going really really well.**

In other words, you've got all these different areas where you're kind of on a mountaintop.

But then **there's this one area** that just weighs everything else down.

So much of life is good but this one thing just really really overshadows everything else.

When you **look at scripture, you'll see that valleys represent several things.**

You'll see that **valleys were often where battles that took place.**

Some of you right now, you may be in a battle in the middle of a valley.

Valleys were seasons of desperation.

Valleys were seasons of loneliness.

And it's interesting that valleys were **also a time of growth.**

The fact is you may **enjoy** God in some ways on the mountaintop, but you **experience** Him in different ways when you're in the valley.

In fact, if you're taking notes, think of it this way.

1. We may Enjoy God on the mountaintops, but we get to Know Him Intimately in the valleys.

We may know God,

We may enjoy God, when times are really really good.

But we get to know Him in a different way when we're in the valleys.

This evening I want you to look at some verses from one of the valley Psalms

Psalms 84.

And if you've ever read through Psalm 84, chances are you read right past these verses.

Psalms 84, starting at verse 5

"What joy for those whose strength comes from the Lord, who have set their minds on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. When they walk through the Valley of Weeping, it will become a place of refreshing springs. The autumn rains will clothe it with blessings. They will continue to grow stronger, and each of them will appear before God in Jerusalem." Psalms 84:5-7

The Valley that it's talking about there was the **Valley of Baka**.

What is the Valley of Baka?

The **Valley of Baka** was most likely **related to a tree.**

Very similar spelling.

And this tree would **ooze out sap.**

If you walked by this tree, people said the tree was called **a weeper.**

It **looked like the tree was crying.**

And that's why the Valley of Baka is translated in different ways in scripture.

It's called the **Valley of Tears.**

It's called the **Valley of Weeping.**

It's called the **Valley of Loss.**

Anytime you see a valley in the Bible you would see a place that was very very dangerous.

There'd be **thorns.**

There'd be **wild animals.**

There would be **people waiting to jump you and rob you.**

In fact, it was **very difficult to get through a valley without something bad happening.**

And this is why the Psalmist says this in verse five.

“What joy for those whose strength comes from the Lord”

If you're here today and you're not a follower of J.C. that means that **even though you may know about God, you don't know him intimately.**

And that means that when you get to those times where you feel like, ***“I've had enough, I can't do anymore, I'm overwhelmed, I'm exhausted, I just don't have enough.”***

If you don't know God intimately, then what you have, is all you have.

What you have is all that you have.

But for those who are Christ followers, we believe that we have a strength that goes beyond just what we have.

That we have access to a heavenly strength and that's why the Psalm has said, ***“What joy for those whose strength comes from the Lord.”***

We believe that when we get to the end of our strength that there is available to us, a heavenly strength.

There is a divine strength.

There is a strength from our God that is available to those who know Him.

And the Bible tells us ***that his strength works best in our weakness.*** (2 Corinthians 12:9)

That's why the Psalmist says . . . ***“What joy for those whose strength comes from the Lord.”***

If you're in the middle of a valley right now, **you have access to the very real, ever present power of a good God** who is available and ready to come and assist you in your time of need.

And as the verses on your notes remind us. . .

There is no place that we can go, where he is not.

“I can never escape from your Spirit!

I can never get away from your presence!

If I go up to heaven, you are there;

if I go down to the grave, you are there.

If I ride the wings of the morning,

if I dwell by the farthest oceans,

even there your hand will guide me,

and your strength will support me.”

Psalm 139:7-10

Not our own strength, but God's strength. . .

“What joy for those whose strength comes from the Lord.”

The text doesn't say ***“What joy for those who make it on their own.”***

It doesn't say ***“What joy for those who can pull themselves up by the bootstraps.”***

It doesn't say ***“What joy for those who are really determined, and hyper-vigilant”***

One of the big problems in our world today is we almost idolize a spirit of independence.

I don't wanna need anybody.

I wanna be financially independent.

I wanna be completely good on my own.

I don't wanna trust people.

I don't want to need people to be there for me.

I don't need God,

I don't need anybody.

We were not created to be independent.

We were created by our God to depend on Him and to depend on others.

What joy for those who realize their need, for they have access to a power greater than themselves.

“What joy for those whose strength comes from the Lord”

And then notice something else. . .

It says . . .

Who have set their minds on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

We're on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

What does that mean?

We may be in the valley, but we're going to what was known as the **City of Refuge**.

Or we were going to the place that they call **the place of peace**.

One commentary said this, it said, ***“To get to the City of Refuge, “you had to travel through the Valley of Tears.”***

I like that imagery.

Sometimes to get to where you really appreciate the presence and the power of God, you have to push through the pain into the presence of the goodness of God.

For many, **the valley is the pathway to the place of peace**.

We've pushed through the valley.

We're on a pilgrimage.

But notice something else. . .

2. What you Think About while you're in the valley Matters.

((REPEAT))

“What joy for those whose strength comes from the Lord, who have set their minds on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

Again . . .

2. What you Think About while you're in the valley Matters.

Paul talked about this a lot in the New Testament.

To the Colossian believers he said this.

“Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.”

Colossians 3:2

Paul told the Philippian believers this.

“Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.” ***Philippians 4:8***

Where you are is one thing.

What you **choose to think about** is something else.

What you think about matters.

Your **current situation may be in the valley.**

But **your mind can still be set upon God.**

Your **heart right now might be racing,** but your mind is set.

Your **soul may be aching, but your mind can be set.**

Your **emotions may be racing,** but **your mind can be set toward God.**

There **may be too much to do,** and there may be **pressure with the in-laws,** and you may be **wondering how we're gonna pay for Christmas** and on and on and on and on and on.

There may be **real tragedies in the valley,** but my mind is set on the goodness of God.

He is with me.

He is for me.

“Greater is He who is in me than He who is in the world.”

My God is going before me to prepare a way for me.

His spirit gives me strength when I am weak.

I need Him every moment of every day.

His word is a lamp unto my feet. It is a light unto my path.

When I cannot make it, His power is very very real.

I may be in the valley, but my mind is set on the kingdom of God.

I'm on a pilgrimage,

I'm going to the place of peace.

You may be in the valley but your mind is set.

Verse six says this, I love this phrase

When they walk through the Valley of Weeping, it will become a place of refreshing springs.

In other words, **we may be in the valley right now but the valley is not our destination.**

What am I doing in the valley?

I'm just passing through.

I may be in the valley right now, **but this is not my home.**

I'm journeying to the place of peace. I'm just passing through.

My God will get me through this. I'm just passing through.

A third truth we should never forget about valleys.

3. God never says you Won't Go Through valleys, but you never have to Go Through them

Alone.

If you're choosing to go through a valley alone, that's your choice, because God promises He will walk with you.

His word is filled with promises that He will be with us in the good times and the bad.

Let me share with you just a couple of examples. . .

The Psalmist David, in what is arguably the most familiar of all 150 Psalms – Psalm 23 – said it this way.

He said . .

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil;

WHY????

For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me." Psalms 23:4

Speaking through the Prophet Isaiah, God promises you and me.

"When you go through deep waters,

I will be with you.

When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown. When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you. For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. . . . Do not be afraid,

WHY???

for I am with you." Isaiah 43:2-3,5

3. God never says you Won't Go Through valleys, but you never have to Go Through them

Alone.

When it comes to what we're looking at this evening . . .

Emmanuel . . .

God with us . . .

How important is the WITH-NESS of God to you?

Is it one of those theological truths that's nice to think about at Christmas, but of no real value the rest of the time?

As you think about that for a moment, let me with you the story about a conversation that God had with Moses.

You know Moses, the one chosen by God to lead the Israelites out of Egypt.

God had a conversation with Moses as God was getting ready to take the people into the promised land.

At this point Egypt was behind them, the promised land was ahead of them.

Take a look at what happens starting in verse 1 of Exodus 33

"The Lord said to Moses, "Get going, you and the people you brought up from the land of Egypt. Go up to the land I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I told them, 'I will give this land to your descendants.'" Exodus 33:1

"And I will send an angel before you to drive out the Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites." Exodus 33:2

Verse 3. . .

"Go up to this land that flows with milk and honey.

But notice this. . .

God says. . .

But I will not travel among you, for you are a stubborn and rebellious people. If I did, I would surely destroy you along the way.” Exodus 33:3

Let me ask you a question. . . .

How would you react if I told you that God would not be traveling with you this week?

How would it make you feel if I told you that as you leave this room today. . .

I just need you to know that as you leave today, God will not be going with you?

How would you feel about that?

Some of you might be surprised and say, ***“Why? What did I do? What did I not do?”***

Some of you might hang your head and say, ***“That upsets me. That makes me sad.”***

Some of you might be indifferent and say, ***“Okay, he’s not gonna be going with me. Good to know.”***

Most of us would be **UPSET** about it.

But I think that most of us, if we heard that when we left here God was not going to be going with us, I think that most of us would sit here for a while and if we heard that God was not going to be going

QUOTE “WITH” us. . .

Most of us would sit here for a while, we’d be upset but then we’d reach a point where we’d say

“I’ve got to go. I’ve got things to do, people to see, places to go.”

It upsets me that God isn’t going with me, but with or without him, I’m leaving.

I hope he can catch up.

I think we’d be upset but I also think that we would decide to go on without him.

But not Moses. . . .

Look at verse 15

“Then Moses said, ‘If you don’t personally go with us, don’t make us leave this place. How will anyone know that you look favorably on me—on me and on your people—if you don’t go with us? For your presence among us sets your people and me apart from all other people on the earth.’” Exodus 33:15-16

Look at what it says in the MESSAGE version. verse 15

“Moses said, ‘If your presence doesn’t take the lead here, call this trip off right now.’” Exodus 33:15-16

Moses says "God, I'm not moving without you.

Please don't send us.

I don't want to take another step unless you are with me."

Moses got it.

He understood that the "With-ness" of God was something to be prized.

The "with-ness" of God is something that you should "Cry out for"

The with-ness of God is something that you should "Plead for"

The with-ness of God is something that you should want and need and cherish in your life.

Moses says "I'm not going without you."

Look at what God says in verse 17

“The Lord replied to Moses, “I will indeed do what you have asked, for I look favorably on you, and I know you by name.” Exodus 33:17

He said, Okay I'll go.

Again, ask yourself . . .

How important is the WITH-NESS of God to you?

Are you willing, in your life to stop everything, and wait for it.

And say ***“God if you’re not going with me, I’m not gonna leave this place.”***

Or are you content to just move along without it?

How do you know when God is with you?

There are lots of ways, but let me just suggest a few.

You know God is with you, when you **can’t go the same places you used to go when He wasn’t.**

Can’t go to the same movies you used to go to

Can’t tell the same jokes you used to tell. . .

Can’t surf the same websites. . . or look at the same magazines or cut the same business deals, because God is With you

You’ll know it and others will know it too.

Others will know it as well.

In the book of Acts, we're told about an encounter that the very first followers of Jesus has with the religious authorities of their day.

And the religious authorities threw them in jail

They threatened them

And they commanded them never again to speak or teach in the name of Jesus.

And the apostles said "We can't"

They said, "We don't want to disobey your command, but what you're asking us to do is something we can not do."

They said, **"We cannot stop telling about everything we have seen and heard."**

And we're told that . . .

"The members of the council were amazed when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, for they could see that they were ordinary men with no special training in the Scriptures. They also recognized them . . .

as men who had been with Jesus." Acts 4:13

The **WITNESS** of Jesus shone through their lives . . . and it will yours too.

If you'll walk with Him.

He will walk with you.

And He will never leave you - - He will never forsake you.

Let's thank him for that as we pray together.