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Title: He Is Here

Text: Matthew 28:20

Matthew 28:20 – *“and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

Over the last number of weeks, except for a few detours, we have done a character study: Who Jesus is and what He came to do – and what it means to be His follower today. The objective of this study has been the same as the Apostle Paul mentioned in Philippians 3, that we will know Him and become like Him. Here are some of the highlights of what we’ve covered so far. First of all, **Jesus is God in the flesh**. He is fully, one-hundred-percent, divine. *“For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form”* (Colossians 2:9). He is also fully, one-hundred-percent, human. He didn’t float around earth in a spiritual body impervious to pain. He became one of us, and dwelt among us. Non-believers sometimes struggle with the idea that He is God. Believers sometimes struggle with the idea that He is human – that He was, as Hebrews says, *“tempted in every way, just as we are.”* And then Hebrews says, *“yet was without sin.”* Jesus came to show us all what it means to live a life wholly surrendered to God. And that means that He came to be a servant, not a celebrity. *“...the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve”* (Matthew 20:28). That’s the example He gave for us to follow: that we are to spend our lives, like Him, serving others. And then we talked about **Jesus the Teacher**, and how He teaches the practical application of spiritual truth. Mainly, He talks to you about you. He never makes it easy for us to look down on others. Instead, He challenges us to put His words into practice in our own individual lives. When we talked about **Jesus the Miracle Worker**, we saw how He is moved with compassion at the suffering of others, and how through faith in Him we can ultimately conquer any challenge life throws in our direction. And then, a couple of weeks ago, we talked about **Jesus’ Ultimate Mission** while He was here on earth. In His words, He came to seek and save what was lost. He came to give His life as a ransom for many. He came to pay a debt He did not owe for those who owe a debt they cannot pay. I’m saying that He came to die on the cross for your sins and mine, so that we can experience salvation, forgiveness, peace with God and peace with ourselves. When I preached this message two weeks ago, I said that if I had only one sermon to preach, it would likely be a sermon about Jesus dying on the cross for our sins. That’s true, but let me qualify. It is true that if I had only one sermon to preach about Jesus, I would preach that sermon just as I preached it. However, I would add everything in today’s sermon to the conclusion. In other words, it would have been a really long sermon.

Today’s sermon is significant because we’ll focus on the fact that we’re not here today to pay homage to a dead man. We’re not here merely to remember our leader who lived so long ago. No, we’re here to celebrate the fact that this Jesus is the resurrected, living Christ! Two thousand years ago He died a violent death on a cruel Roman cross, and He was buried in a borrowed tomb. His enemies thought that that was all there was to it, BUT on the third day the Spirit of God entered that cave and breathed life into His nostrils and His lungs filled with air and His heart started to pound and His blood began to flow and He stood to His feet and discarded the shroud of death and He walked out of the grave, victorious over death – and HE LIVES TODAY! It was not a spiritual “ghostly” type of resurrection. It was not a symbolic resurrection. It was not merely a resurrection of memory, as if to say, “Though He is gone, His memory lingers on.” No, the resurrection of Jesus was a physical, bodily resurrection. Over the next 40 days, He appeared to His followers on many occasions, giving them conclusive proof that He is, in fact, who He claimed to be: the Son of God, the King of all Kings, and the Lord of all Lords. After His resurrection you can see a huge difference in the behavior of His disciples. When Jesus died, He died alone – everyone abandoned Him except His mother, the Apostle John, and a few other women. And then, just a short time later, all those who had abandoned Him returned. You soon find them preaching the gospel boldly in the marketplace, in spite of fierce opposition and persecution and threat of imprisonment. And this is how they lived the remainder of their lives. Nearly all of the apostles, according to historical legend, died the death of a martyr. What made the difference? What changed them from being cowards to being courageous? Two reasons. One we’ll look at in a minute, but the primary reason for the radical transformation in the lives of the early apostles is that they had a first-hand, face-to-face encounter with the risen Christ. He was alive, and then He was dead, and now He’s alive again! They realized that if He can conquer death, there’s nothing that the world can do to them, because He has authority over it all. For forty days after the death and resurrection of Jesus, He appeared to His followers on several occasions. He continued to teach them kingdom principles, and He taught them about what was to come. And then, right before their eyes, He ascended into heaven. Among the last words He spoke to His disciples was to give

them a mission: to preach the gospel all over the world, and make new disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to follow His teachings. And then He said, *“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”* Where is Jesus today? Physically, He’s seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. But also, He is with us. Right here with us – not just in memory, not just metaphorically, but in a very real and literal sense, He is with us. That means you can encounter His presence every day of your life – because He is with you ALWAYS! So today I want to talk to you about three ways you encounter the presence of the risen and living Christ.

- 1. You encounter His presence through the filling of the Holy Spirit.** Before Jesus ascended into heaven, He told His disciples to stay in Jerusalem and wait until they were clothed with power from on high (Luke 24:49). And He said, *“...in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit...and you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you”* (Acts 1:5,8). That’s exactly what happened. Jerusalem was filled with visitors from all over the world to celebrate the feast known as Pentecost – a major Jewish holiday. And the disciples gathered in an upper room to pray, and then suddenly the sound like a mighty wind filled the whole house and flames of fire rested upon each one of them and they all begin speaking in different languages. As they moved out into the streets, people from all over could hear them praising God in various languages, and they were amazed. They asked, *“How is it that these unschooled Galileans – which is about like saying, ‘these hillbillies’ – are speaking our languages?”* The Apostle Peter took the stage and stood before the crowd and preached the gospel, and afterward 3,000 people were saved. Jesus said that you will receive power when you receive the Holy Spirit. That’s what happened at Pentecost and it still happens today. Basically there were two reasons to explain the disciples’ radical transformation from being cowards and abandoning Jesus, to being bold and courageous and willing to die for Him? The first reason is that they witnessed face-to-face the risen Christ. The second reason is that they experienced the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is where the power to live the Christian life comes from. Before Jesus died, He told them that He would send the Holy Spirit to dwell with them. *“I will ask the Father, and he will give another Counselor to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth”* (John 14:15). And then He said, *“I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you”* (John 14:18). I will come to you. Jesus is saying that to be filled with the Holy Spirit is to be filled with His (Jesus) presence. I will be with you. We sometimes talk about asking Jesus to come into our hearts. There’s a sense in which that’s what happens. Jesus comes to dwell in your spirit through the Holy Spirit. For this reason, you don’t pray to a God who is millions of light years away on the other side of the universe. You pray to a God who is right here with you, all the time. HE IS HERE! I love to remind myself of this throughout the day. When I’m in my car, I’m not alone. HE IS HERE. When I’m in my study, I’m not alone. HE IS HERE. When I’m surrounded by people who are none too fond of me, I’m not alone. HE IS HERE. He is here through the presence of His Holy Spirit, who dwells in our spirits. This is why it is wise to ask God every day to fill us with His Spirit, so that we can fully experience the presence of Jesus. *“Be filled with the Spirit.”* The original language indicates to keep being filled. We encounter the presence of Jesus through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.
- 2. You encounter His presence through the community of believers.** Jesus said, *“For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them”* (Matthew 18:20). Whenever we come together as God’s people, the Word assures us that He is here among us. I read a story recently of a gentleman who was preparing to speak at a worship event and as they were planning out the details, a couple of the people in leadership used an interesting phrase. They said we’ll do this or we’ll do that... *“and let’s see if God shows up.”* They said it two or three times: *“Let’s see if God shows up.”* Finally, the invited speaker said, *“I’m being nit-picky here, because I realize that it’s just a phrase, but if there’s any doubt that God is going to show up, we might need to cancel our plans.”* They were just using a phrase that people in the church sometimes use, but the problem is that it’s a phrase fraught with theological error, and we should never use it. When we come together in His name, God WILL show up. Jesus WILL be here among us. It’s guaranteed. HE IS HERE. Sometimes we might not make Him feel welcome. Sometimes we might try to hinder Him from moving among us, but you can be sure that HE IS HERE. I love this phrase from the King James Version... *“But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel”* (Psalm 22:3). This is still true today. God inhabits the praises of His people. When the community of faith comes together in His name, He joins the party. HE IS HERE! We don’t have to wonder if He’s coming. We don’t have to wait for Him to show up. We just have to acknowledge His presence among us. That’s why, when you feel like you’re far away from Jesus, you should attend a worship service – because He WILL be there. We encounter Jesus through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. We encounter Him through the fellowship of believers. And do you know where else we encounter Him?
- 3. You encounter His presence through those who need your ministry.** Jesus said on the final day of judgment

there will be those to whom He says... (³⁴*Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'* ³⁷*Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' ⁴⁰The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me'*) (Matthew 25:34-40). Throughout the gospels, we see over and over that Jesus was moved with compassion to help those who hurt. And we've seen that He expects us to pick up where He left off, reaching out to those in need. But here is where the plot thickens. He said, in effect, "When you minister to those in need, you're not just ministering to them. You're ministering to ME." Mother Teresa once said about her mission in Calcutta, "Every day I seek Jesus in all His distressing disguises." There will be times – you can be sure it will happen this week – when you will encounter a person in need, and you'll have at your disposal the wherewithal to meet that need. It may be a few dollars. It may be a word of encouragement. It may be passing some time with them, or giving them a ride somewhere. You may not recognize it at first, but Jesus will be present in that situation. The compassion you show to another, He will receive for Himself. Do you want to see Jesus? Do you want a personal encounter with the risen Christ? I'll tell you where you can find Him. He's at a soup kitchen. Maybe you could go there and serve Him. He's at a busy intersection, selling newspapers to the people waiting for the light to change. He's in the home of an elderly woman who can't take care of her lawn anymore. Or the overwhelmed father who can either pay to have his car repaired or pay to take his son to the doctor, but not both. You can encounter Him in the person who has failed so many times in so many ways that it seems no one could ever love them, the person who has been tossed aside by the rest of society. You will encounter Jesus this week – no doubt about it – disguised as *"one of the least of these."* As His follower, He's reminding you that when you reach out to them, you're reaching out to Him.

- 4. Conclusion.** Jesus Christ is alive today! This is one of the many things that makes Him different from all the other religious leaders of the past. We're not here to honor one who is dead, but to celebrate the One whom death cannot contain. His resurrection proves to us that He is who He said He is. *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"* (John 14:6). It is through faith in Him and through following Him that we experience life. New life. His life in us. When you receive Jesus, He takes up residence in your spirit through the Holy Spirit. Maybe you first became His follower many years ago – so many years ago that you sometimes forget that He is right here with you all the time. Maybe you forget sometimes to acknowledge His presence; I think we all do. In order for us to accomplish what we've set out to do in this series – to know Him and become like Him, we begin by making it a daily habit to acknowledge His presence. When you wake up in the morning, remind yourself, "He is here." As you go about your day, "He is here." When you close your eyes at night, "He is here." When you come to worship, "He is here." When you see a person in need, "He is here." He promised it would be so. *"And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* Wherever you go, whatever you do, you can be sure one thing is true – HE IS HERE! The question you may ask and answer all throughout the day is: How, then, will I respond to His presence in this moment?