

God with us 3 – In the Struggle

Welcome one & all to Redemption Church. Merry Christmas to everyone here in Plano Tx and warmest Christmas greetings to everyone watching & listening online.

What is Christmas about? We can answer that with three words. GOD WITH US.

GOD WITH US

The true message of this season is that you are not alone. God is with us. 0

Matthew 1:23 (NIV2011) “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).

In week 1 we told you God is with us in the silence.

God is with us in the silence

The birth of Jesus Christ is proof that God and His promises were always with us.

Last week we told you that God is with us in the pain.

God is with us in the pain

We told you about a dead marriage, a dead reputation, and a dead baby that are all found within the Christmas story. It was in the middle of that pain that Jesus came to earth. God is still found in the middle of our pain.

Today I want you to know that God is with us in the struggle.

God is with us in the struggle

Redemption Church, do any of you know what a struggle is? Are there any of you that need the idea of struggle defined for you? In case there was anyone who came to Church today who has never had a problem in life.. I prepared a definition.

To struggle is to push, strive, and work to achieve or attain something in the face of difficulty or resistance

- When you are trying to do something, but it isn't easy... it's a struggle.
- When you are trying to help someone but they don't understand your motives and it turns into a fight... it's a struggle.

- When your dreams are on life support and you feel like you can't do anything less than your best because it may all fall apart any moment... it's a struggle.
- When you are trying to drag your family out of debt but it seems like everything you own is breaking... it's a struggle.
- When what you are pushing to do starts to push back against you... it's a struggle.

Money struggles. People struggles. Health struggles. Emotional struggles. Faith struggles.

The Struggle is Real

Can I just tell you for a moment that you aren't crazy. The Struggle is real. You are NOT imagining this difficulty. It is real. You aren't making up this issue. The struggle is real.

Sometimes we people are the worst at recognizing the struggles of others. Sometimes we belittle the struggle of others. There are times we open up about our struggle and people respond in flippant ways...

Ex. You tell someone about the struggle of parenting your child that is not doing well. And the person responds... it's nothing a belt wouldn't fix. And it is all you can do to not snap at them "Do tell me how many spankings does it take to whip the Autism out of my child!"

People don't always understand your struggle. These people aren't ready to talk about your struggle because often they haven't owned their own struggle yet.

Christians aren't always great at responding to someone in a struggle.

EX. You open up about something you are really struggling with. You feel like you are barely holding on... and they respond in Christian clichés...

"Well brother you just gotta have faith..." ...Like confessing the struggle was a lack of faith.

"Well sister I'll be praying..." ...will you really be praying? Why not pray now. How about we stand in faith NOW!?

Redemption can we be a church that stands with people in their struggle? Can we stop standing in judgment against those with struggle and start standing with those in the struggle?!

The struggle is real, but so is my faith! The struggle is real but so is my God! I'm going to stand with you and push with you.. work with you... strive with you. The struggle is real!

I am so thankful that the Christmas account doesn't leave out the struggle. I am equally glad that the Christmas story doesn't focus on the struggle... The focus is Jesus Christ. That is how it should be in our story. Our story should not make the struggle the focus. Our focus should be the arrival of Jesus in our life.

Last week we talked about the pain between Joseph & Mary. We are going to pick up in that 1st chapter of Luke where the Angel Gabriel is talking to Mary.

Luke 1:36 (NIV2011) Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month.

Luke 1:37 (NIV2011) For no word from God will ever fail."

Luke 1:38 (NIV2011) "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.

Luke 1:39 (NIV2011) At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea,

Have you ever seen a desperate woman who was in a hurry? She is told by the Angel that she would have a miraculous birth and that her cousin Elizabeth would also have a miraculous birth. This was a sure fire sign that what the Angel had said was true. If her cousin is miraculously in her 6th month of pregnancy, then what the Angel said about her pregnancy can be also be believed.

She may have also wanted to go see Elizabeth because she was excited for her cousin who had struggled to have a child but never could. Don't be so captured by your struggle that you don't celebrate someone overcoming their struggle.

- So Mary hurried to a small town in the hill country of Judea. History reports the city to be called "Ein Karem." And as far a hill country, other translations say mountain region.
- Ein Karem is 90 miles from Nazareth. Elizabeth was not just down the block. The assurance that Mary sought was 90 miles away.
- And does scripture say that anyone traveled with Mary? Scripture leads us to believe that she made this journey by herself.
- She is in the early stages of pregnancy. There are many physical and emotional struggles. Morning sickness, fatigue, mood swings, and headaches to name just a few struggles.
- Mary's situation was full of struggle.

Who other than Elizabeth could understand the struggle of Mary? Who other than Mary could understand the struggle of Elizabeth. They were both having miraculous pregnancies that would fulfill Messianic prophecy. Their struggle puts them front and center in the Christmas story. Mary & Elizabeth had each other.

You are not the only one with a struggle. We need each other, and all the more in the struggle.

So Mary in her struggle... struggled 90 miles to get to someone who could understand. And here Mary & Elizabeth strengthened each other.

On this journey Mary spent time, no doubt, thinking about how she was going to face Joseph. I imagine a large amount of her time was playing out how that conversation would go down. Mary was struggling with the unknown, but thank goodness for the support of Elizabeth.

Yet.. the moment came where Mary had to leave her support in Elizabeth, and travel alone, back 90 miles, to face her struggle face to face.

Life will require you to leave your support and face your struggle.

She had Elizabeth, but she had to leave her behind and go face the struggle.

Mary had the Angel visitation but in Luke 1:38 it says these words... "Then the Angel left her."

Luke 1:38 (NIV2011) "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." **Then the angel left her.**

We all need the support of others, but life will require us to leave the support and face the struggle.

Mary left her support, yet she was not alone. The angel had also said..

Luke 1:28 (NIV2011) "Greetings, you who are highly favored! **The Lord is with you.**"

God is with us in the struggle

As Mary stares her struggle in the face... As she looks at Joseph and tries to speak the best version of her conversation that had played out in her head... As she does her best to save this marriage... Joseph reveals to Mary that God had, unknown to her, already spoken to Him.

While Mary was 90 miles away... While Mary was in a place where it was impossible to influence the situation... God was with her in the struggle. God spoke to Joseph and fixed everything.

Are you facing a struggle that you aren't even in a position to influence the outcome? That is good news! Now it is up to God to influence your struggle. AND HE WILL!

There are actually times where God has to get you out of town so that he can fix things. **There are times where God waits for you to exhaust all your effort so that He can show you His effort.** The best place to be, is where you give up your struggle and give it to God.

Our God is Immanuel. He is with us in the struggle. And your struggle is no struggle for God.

Your struggle is no struggle for God.

There are these struggles that push on you, and all your effort doesn't seem to amount to much. But your struggle is not able to push God around. Let the struggle push all it wants, it is no match for God's effort.

Every struggle that Mary faced, God took care of it.

- We talked about the 90 mile trip early in her pregnancy. Later in the pregnancy she was made to travel an 80 mile trip to Bethlehem. She was actually in labor on this 80 trip. The struggles kept coming.
- In Bethlehem they found no place to stay. The struggles kept coming.
- King Herod started killing young boys in an effort to kill the messiah. The struggles kept coming.
- The struggles kept coming, but God kept coming! God saw Mary through the struggle.

God was with her every step of the struggle. She literally carried God incarnate inside of her as she made these journeys. She literally held God's presence in her hands. God is with us in our struggle – literally. You can carry God's presence inside of you through the Holy Spirit infilling.

The Struggle is Real but so is God

We often think God must not be with us because we are facing struggle. We incorrectly think that if God were with us we would be struggle free. Not so.

The struggle does not chase God off. The presence of struggle does not mean God's presence is diminished. The presence of struggle does not mean God's promise will not come to pass. The Christmas story is proof of this fact.

Musician

Your struggle is real. Do you want God to handle your struggle today?

We do 3 things every time we come to Redemption Church.

1. Everyone worships. We have done that today.
2. We receive the word of God. We have just done that.
3. Now comes that 3rd thing, it is time to talk to God.

Come surrender your struggle to God today. Come declare that the struggle is real, but so is your God.

To struggle is to push, strive, and work to achieve or attain something in the face of difficulty or resistance

Mary pushed and struggled 90 miles to get to someone who understood. You don't have to travel 90 miles today. The one who understands is here with us right now.

The Lord is with you.