**Series: Jesus Is.\_\_\_\_\_.**

**Title: With You Always**

**Speaker: Ryan Bien**

A lot of you have **traveled internationally**, which means you went through customs and had to interact with border guards.

I bet there was a time when you have been **uneasy** when you crossed an international border and had to talk to an official.

I have experienced being a **nervous wreck** crossing the border.

I’m from Canada and several years ago I had to **apply for a work visa** so I could stay in the United States. I was here for school and finished my program, so my student visa was about to expire.

I had also **met this amazing girl**, some of you know her, her name is Katie. She’s my wife.

Katie and I met at school and somehow when I **asked her to marry me** she actually said yes! So I wanted to stay.

And you know, when you’re young and finishing school and making plans to get married. **Everything is in flux** and we didn’t quite know how it would all work out.

We had packed up and **moved** from California to Texas, our **wedding** was only a couple months away, I had a **new job** offer in Dallas. Katie was going to do **more school**. It all sounded great, except our nice little plan hinged on me getting approved for a work visa.

If I didn’t get a visa my options were to **re-enroll in school**. No thanks, I was done. **Move back to Canada** without Katie. Not interested in that at ALL. Or live in the country **illegally**. That’s never a good idea, is it?

Getting a work visa is **complicated** and I had a lot riding on it, so I **hired a lawyer** from an immigration law firm.

Based on my circumstances the lawyer advised I apply for a **religious worker visa**. The interesting thing about a religious worker visa is it’s one of the only visas where you can **apply at the US border in person** as you enter the country.

So, after months of planning and legal paperwork I bought a **flight from DFW to Buffalo, New York**. When I landed in Buffalo I rented a car at the airport and drove straight to the Canadian border.

As soon as I crossed the border into Canada I **did a U-turn** in my little rental car, and I stopped right back at the United States **Homeland Security Office** with my application in hand.

The nerve wracking part is the Homeland Security Officer had the authority to review my visa application and either **approve or reject** me right on the spot. No pressure!

I got in line, hoping for the best. As I stood nervously waiting for my turn I **sized up the different officers**. He looks alright, she seems friendly, oh dear no… *he* looks mean and grumpy.

Guess which officer I got? Yeah… the **mean, grumpy one**.

When I reached the front of the line, he waved at me signaling I could approach his station. I thought, “**I’m doomed! I got the mean guy!**”

Let me tell you I was a **nervous mess**. My heart was pounding in my chest, I felt hot and sweaty.

I handed the guard my application and he began to flip through it. He seemed **irritated by my mere presence**. I’m sorry for existing! Then he started asking me LOTS of questions. I was in the HOT SEAT.

And part way through the process he had **a hang up with one of the details** on my application. He kept asking me for clarification, and I kept doing my best to explain myself.

I started to **imagine the worst**. This isn’t working! He’s going to reject me. I’ll be stuck in Canada. We’ll have to postpone our wedding.

Then the guard got quiet as he shuffled papers around. I found myself saying repeatedly in my head, “**God work in this man’s heart**. Please soften his heart.”

Finally, in the moment of truth, that mean, grumpy officer pulled out his big stamp and he **approved my visa!** Success! What a relief.

Well, today I am going to use my **stressful experience** at the border to help you see that ***Jesus Is With You Always.***

We’re in this series called ***Jesus Is\_\_\_.*** And I love this topic because over the next several weeks you get to think about the **person of Jesus**. What is he about? What did he accomplish? And what does it mean for your life?

When you get the chance to talk about Jesus and say what you think about him, there’s something about that. **It’s powerful**. So, I hope you will take advantage of this chance to think about *Who Is Jesus To Me?*

Let’s look at these words from Jesus in **John 14: 15-18**

Jesus is sharing a **final meal** with his closest friends; this is happening hours before his **betrayal and death**. He’s sharing important teaching in this section of scripture.

And he **drops a bombshell**: Jesus explains he is going to leave his followers, which they don’t like, but he also assures them they will not be abandoned…

***If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.***

One of my **favorite words** for the Holy Spirit is this word Jesus uses, ***Advocate*.**

Some older English translations have the word ***counselor*.** I grew up with that word, *counselor*, and **it confused me** because I would imagine **sitting down with a therapist**. That was ok, but that image always seemed like it wasn’t quite right.

The greek word used in this verse is **Paraklete**.

Paraklete refers to a person who **comes alongside you** during a time of **legal difficulty**. So, Jesus audience probably thought of a Legal Advisor.

Sometimes we call lawyers, counselors. Right? When your cousin got pulled into that Ponzi Scheme that seemed way too good to be true you said… **“You better lawyer up.”**

Because an attorney provides **specialized** counsel and expertise that you don’t have on your own.

Suddenly my **experience at the border** brings Jesus’ description of the Holy Spirit to life.

You see, when I stood in front of that Border Guard, I didn’t have **what it would take** on my own. I didn’t know the **rules**, I didn’t understand the **procedures**, I lacked the **vocabulary** and the proper **language** to use.

But my lawyer **came alongside me** as my advocate. She was the **champion** of my cause. The **spokesperson** and **defender** that I needed.

The visa application her legal office organized was **THIS thick**. I never could have put it together on my own.

They knew all the **forms and statements** that were needed. They gathered all the **evidence** for my case. They used all the right **words and language** that I don’t even have in my vocabulary.

The first page of my application had a **beautiful cover letter**. It was eloquently written and said something like…. “On **behalf** of Ryan Bien we present his case. We will **speak for him** and prove that he meets all of the requirements.”

Except it was worded way better than that. Like I said, **I don’t have the words!**

And that’s **Jesus’ promise** to you. [pause] Jesus is With You Always because you have **full access** to the Holy Spirit.

When you become a Christian...

 God’s Spirit is literally ***Within***you always. The Spirit dwelling inside you is your **Advocate**.

The Spirit will **counsel** you and guide you.

When you are inadequate The Spirit is your **Champion**.

When you lack what’s needed The Spirit will be your **Spokesperson**.

Now you’re thinking, that sounds good, but how do I really experience **having God with me** all the time? At the start of **verse 15** Jesus says, “**If you love me, keep my commands**.”

That’s it. When you are willing to say, Jesus I love you. I want to follow you. I believe your way of life is better than my way. When you commit to **following Jesus**, he promises that the Holy Spirit will **live with you** to help you and guide you always.

Paul takes this idea and expands it in the book of Romans. Let’s look at **Romans 8:26-27**.

***In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God.***

Jesus statement in John focuses on **the *Who***. Who is going to help me? Who will be my advocate? The Holy Spirit will.

Paul focuses on **the *How***. How will the Holy Spirit help me?

This is refreshing. This is good… Paul says that connecting with God is **not about saying and doing the right things.**

Because… we love to fall into the bad habit of **If I could just**…

If I could just say the **right prayer**, if I could just **act the right way** this week, If I could just **stop this behavior**…. Then I would be able to approach God & connect with Him.

Paul, says ***no way***. Nope, that’s not how you have a **healthy relationship** with God.

Where does God meet us? When does the Spirit come to help? **In our… WEAKNESS**.

Not in **your strength**. Not when you **have it all together**. Not when it’s **all figured out**.

But in your weakness. When you are **inadequate**. When you are **down and out**. When you’re **at a loss** for what to say and even what to pray for.

The Holy Spirit dwelling inside you knows the **pain and the groans inside your heart**. And He takes those aches that you can’t even put into words and **intercedes** for you.

So, the Holy Spirit is your **advocate**. He is also your ***Interceder***.

An interceder… “acts **on behalf of someone** in difficulty or trouble”.

When you are **weak** and in **trouble**, the Spirit swoops in as your helper.

The liaison between **your weakness** and **God’s strength**.

Why does He intercede? **Verse 27** says the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in ***accordance with the will of God***.

**[Point to screen]** Accordance is a way of saying harmony or **unity**…

When you’re **weak**, or in **trouble,** the Spirit helps you line up with **God’s will** for your life. Your will and God’s will **become united**.

When you are following Jesus, you don’t have to **perform perfectly**. You don’t even have to come up with the **right words** to say.

What you cannot accomplish, God has **accomplished**.

What you cannot coordinate, The Spirit **brings together**.

Most of you live here in the greater **Houston area**. Houston is a vibrant place and our city has earned **several nicknames**.

There’s the ***Bayou City*** – which I think means we live in a giant swamp. Is that right?

Houston is called ***The Energy Capital of the World***. A lot of you work in the Oil and Gas industry.

If you need a trusty, no-frills, nickname there’s always ***H-Town***. Hopefully that one is self-explanatory.

For cool factor we’ve got ***Clutch City*** – that one arose when Houston won back-to-back NBA championships in 1994 and 1995. (I’m surprised no one started cheering!)

My personal favorite happens to be the **official** nickname for the City of Houston: ***Space City*.** That’s a cool nickname.

No one is going to **out-space** Houston. We’re so ***Space City*** that we named our basketball team the Rockets, and our baseball team the Astros.

Of course, this is all a reference to the **Johnson Space Center** right down I-45, which is a hub for NASA’s space program.

So, if there is one thing Houston is famous for around the world; it’s **Rockets.** And let’s be honest… Rockets are awesome.

Now, in case you don’t believe me, I’m going to **prove it** to you. I’m going to start a sentence and I want you to **complete the sentence** by telling me the last word.

And I’m confident that ***everyone*** knows the right word to use.

Are you ready? Here we go. Don’t leave me hanging… when I point to you, say it loud and proud.

**“Houston, we have a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_. “**

There it is. **Houston, we have a problem.** 2-time Academy Award winner, Tom Hanks said that iconic line in a Ron Howard movie about the Apollo 13 mission to the moon. It doesn’t get bigger than that. We are **Space City**!

A couple years ago **my family** came to stay with us for Christmas. My nephews and niece were here and none of them had ever been to Houston. When your family that’s never been to Space City comes to visit, you take them to the **Space Center** to see **NASA**.

We took the **NASA Tram Tour** and the tram takes you to this massive hanger. Inside the hanger there is a **real-life rocket.** This is going to sound funny. but I was so **amazed** at how BIG a rocket is. It’s the Saturn 5 Rocket and it’s the tallest, heaviest and most powerful rocket ever flown.

Here it is. In all its glory. **[show picture of Saturn V Rocket]**

**Rockets** are gigantic! And they have tremendous power.

And It struck me that it took so much **human work and effort** to build something this huge that has enough raw power to push a person off the ground and up into space.

Because we’re **stuck down here,** and we’re trying to **get up there**.

That’s what rockets do. They **launch people** up off the ground because we can’t reach the heavens on our own.

Some of you here today are **new to Christianity**. You might be checking it out and deciding what you believe about Jesus. Some of you have been **following Jesus** for a long time.

It doesn’t matter if you’re new to Christianity or you’ve been a Christian for years, it is **human nature** that we keep trying to work our way up to God.

It’s like we’re **stuck down here** and we’re trying to **get up there**. We work at feeling like we are worthy enough to be with God.

So, you’re **expending all this energy** trying to get up there. Trying to get yourself to Jesus’ level.

You started your own **Space program**, and built yourself a **Saturn 5 sized rocket**. It’s strapped to your back and you keep trying to blast yourself up to him. And just like an **Apollo Mission** it’s taking a ton of work and effort for you to try to make it to Jesus.

You know how that feels…

* Any time you sin, or mess up, you carry a **heavy load of guilt** around
* You might even try to **distance yourself** from God for a while because you feel inadequate
* You have a hard time **forgiving yourself** for things in your past
* You make your relationship with Jesus **a burden** because you have a long task list of all the things you need to get right to be considered a good person
* You stay busy with **service projects** and **church activities** out of a sense of duty

And it’s **EXHAUSTING**… constantly trying to make it up to this **lofty place** by your own effort. The load is too heavy.

**Louie Giglio** is a popular speaker and writer. And Louie talks about riding an **elevator**.

A lot of you rode in an elevator this week. If you’re like me, you have **no idea how an elevator actually works**.

**Be honest**... You just push a button, the doors open up, you step inside and the elevator takes you up to the level you need to get to, doors open again and voila, you’re on a higher floor.

But, there’s **impressive science** that makes it possible for you to be lifted up by an elevator.

Elevators have a **Counter Weight**. When you get in the elevator of a skyscraper, the elevator car doesn’t magically float up to the 35th floor. The **counterweight offsets** the weight of the car you’re in and lifts you up.

The heavy counterweight **comes down**, so that you can **go up.**

When it comes to **knowing God**, and understanding **who Jesus is**, this is what it’s all about.

**[Pause]**

Jesus has you covered. He has done **all the heavy work**. There is no energy or effort required to prove yourself. To make yourself worthy. To make it up to God’s level.

No amount of **good behavior**, no **work** on your part, no **guilt or pressure** that you need to put on yourself. No **paying the price**.

Take your **Saturn 5 rocket pack off** and breathe a sigh of relief. All the pressure is off. STOP building your own rocket ship….. [PAUSE]

Just get on **the elevator**. And let Jesus do the **heavy lifting**.

Because, Jesus says you don’t have to work hard to make it up to my level, I’m **coming down** in order to **bring you up**. Jesus is the **counter-weight** in your life. He came down, so that you could be lifted up.

In **Philippians 2:6-8** Paul says, (English Standard Version)

**6… *though he was in the form of God, (Jesus) did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,7but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant,being born in the likeness of men. 8And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.***

Jesus came down to us, and when he died on the cross he took on **all the weight of your sin**. His death and resurrection is the ultimate counterweight.

Whatever **weight** you’re carrying, whatever **burden** you have, any **baggage** you need to let go of… there is no heavy load that Jesus can’t pick up… he has come down, to lift you up.

This is key. This is the whole message for today. Jesus’ counterweight has the power to lift you up to **heaven**…. But it also has the power to **lift you up in *every* daily challenge you face.**

Because some of you are saying, **heaven sounds awesome**, but what about **the week ahead** I have to deal with?

Life has **challenges** and **burdens** that you’re trying to navigate. Sometimes you’re hanging on one day at a time.

That’s why Jesus sent the Holy Spirit. Your ***Advocate***. To be with you in every situation.

Here’s the **take home** for today. When you go to your **Connection Group** this week this is a good thing for you to talk about together.

**If Jesus is always with you, what does this mean for you today?**

You can expect that things will happen when the Holy Spirit is with you in life.

Here’s what you **ALREADY** have WITHIN YOU:

1. The power to change your **attitude** **and actions.** You have that power because Jesus is with you.
2. You have the strength to **serve others** even when it’s difficult. Not because you are strong but because Jesus is with you.
3. The ability to persevere through **hard circumstances** is already there because Jesus is with you.
4. You have the freedom to live **guilt free** because God is with you no matter what.

When you have the Holy Spirit in your life … God is **never far** from you. There’s no **distance**. No **separation**. You don’t have to pray that He will **“show up”** to whatever situation is going on. There’s no **inviting Him** to join you. And you don’t have to **make yourself worthy** to be in His presence.

You know Him… For He lives with you, and will be in you.

He is **with you**. Always.

Pray with me.