

Immanuel

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Preacher: Paul Hay

[0 : 00] Heavenly Father, we want to express our deepest gratitude for the past year's blessing. Thank you for your faithfulness, your love, and your constant presence in our lives. We acknowledge your sovereignty over the days gone by and the days yet to come.

We also acknowledge that we have failed you in so many ways in the past year. We have sinned in thought, word, and deed. Thank you for your continued forgiveness and cleansing.

Lord, we look forward to you, our hope, our peace, and our comfort in the new year. As we enter the unknown in the coming year, we ask for your guidance and wisdom.

Illuminate our paths with your light so that we can walk in your ways and make choices that align with your will. Help us to seek first your kingdom and trust that all other things will be added unto us. Gracious God, we come before you seeking renewal in the new year. Renew our minds, our hearts, and our spirits. May we be transformed by the power of your Holy Spirit, leaving behind the old and embracing the new that you have in store for us.

[1 : 06] Heavenly Father, if we face both known and unknown challenges in the coming year, grant us strength and courage. Help us to rely on your mighty power and to find refuge in you.

May we be steadfast in our faith, knowing that you are our rock and our fortress. Lord, as we embarked on the new year, we left up to you our loved ones, our communities, and the world.

May your peace reign in our hearts and the hearts of all people. Bring healing where there's brokenness and reconciliation where there's division. We also pray for Castor Kent and his others as they're traveling during these terrible winter conditions.

Keep them safe in your everlasting arms. These things we pray in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. And this morning's scripture is John chapter 1, verses 1 to 14.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made. Without him nothing has been made that has been made.

[2 : 11] In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness is all over. Come at it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light. He came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which is his own, but his own did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

Children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or husband's will, but born of God. The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. When I grew up at school, a lot of kids teased me about my last name.

[3 : 21] They thought Hay was a funny name, so they made comments like, straw is cheaper and grass is free. Eventually, I got over it.

And I'm not bothered. Just that very often, people get my name backwards. They come up to me and say, hey, Paul. And I have to correct them, it's Paul Hay.

I was also teased about my last name. I didn't particularly like that either.

But then, interestingly enough, when my daughter grew up and started dating someone who also happened to name Paul, I thought, I teased them and said, oh, you can name your firstborn son after me.

So they teased me back and said that they'd give him my middle name. I thought, well, it won't happen. But it did. They did name their firstborn son, Malcolm.

[4 : 23] And now, Malcolm's not such a bad name after all. Got used to it. It sounds pretty good, but I didn't like it at first. Names can mean a lot. It can mean the subject of derision and stuff.

I think of some of the names in the Bible, like Isaiah's children, Mer, Shahu, Shalahashbath, and Cher, Yashub. And I'm thinking, Malcolm's not so bad. And then Isaiah gave Jesus several symbolic names.

Prince of Peace, Mighty God, Everlasting Father. But, of course, he also gave him that other symbolic name, Emmanuel, which means God with us.

And today, since today's Ukrainian Christmas, I'd like to talk on that theme. God is with us. That in Christ, who is both fully divine and fully human, God came down to earth to live with us.

The word became flesh and lived among us. Sometimes we sort of, evangelical Christians, sort of jump from Christmas to Easter and think, Oh, Jesus came to earth to die for us.

[5 : 39] Yes, he did. But we must also remember that he came to live for us as well. And we need to focus on his life as well. That Jesus was fully human.

Sometimes, well, in the early ages, there was a lot of heresies about Jesus. One of them was a very interesting one. They said that Jesus was fully divine, but not really human.

They used to say things like, when he walked on the earth, he made no footprints in the sand. That he wasn't human at all. But when I read my Bible, it talks about how Jesus fell asleep in the boat.

That's kind of human to me. I mean, a number of you might fall asleep in church today. I think it was Mark Twain that once said, If all the people that have ever fallen asleep in church were laid end to end, they'd be a lot more comfortable.

You know, that's human. I misconfessed I've fallen asleep in church myself at times. Never when I'm preaching. I'm preaching. So, you know, he's fully human.

[6 : 47] And we need to focus on that. That God is with us in Christ. I'd like to look at some of the ways that it showed that Jesus experienced the same pain that we experience.

Jesus experienced the pain of estrangement. In John chapter 6, we have the story of how Jesus is talking to the people after he's fed the 5,000, and he's talking to them about how he is the living bread.

And people didn't exactly respond that well to that statement. In John 6, 60, it says, On hearing many of his disciples said, This is a hard teaching.

Who can accept it? I didn't like the fact that they had to actually make a full-hearted commitment to Jesus Christ. Some of us said, Well, it's because they didn't understand what he was saying.

Well, the disciples didn't fully understand him either. And yet, Peter said to them, Said to him, Lord, to whom shall we go?

[7 : 50] You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God. And it also says his own brothers did not believe him. Jesus knew the pain of estrangement.

I know of, I've heard of people where brothers and sisters don't talk to one another. I remember Tony Campola talked about one time when he was in the church. He saw two sisters that were one end of the church, and the other one is at the end of the church, they wouldn't have anything to do with each other.

And this thing, and then he found out they lived together. Oh, you go, What? But, you know, the estrangement can be that incredible. And if you've never known the pain of estrangement, you're indeed fortunate.

Jesus knew that pain of estrangement. He knew what it was like to have people reject him and reject him with hostility. Jesus also knew the pain of being misunderstood.

In Matthew 13 to 14, 13, 14, and 15, it says that Jesus spoke in parables so that people wouldn't fully understand him. It quotes Isaiah 6, the latter part of the chapter, where it's, you know, be ever hearing and not hearing, not knowing.

[9 : 06] He spoke in stories, to many of the people, the stories, oh, that's a nice story, but they didn't really understand its meaning. He explained it to his disciples.

And that way they got the message of the kingdom of God. Except they didn't. He spoke all the time about the kingdom of God, a spiritual kingdom.

Even said to Pilate, my kingdom is not of this world. And he spoke for three years to the disciples about the nature of the kingdom of God. So, after he's crucified, rise, rose from the dead, and speak to them for 40 years, just as he's about to ascend into heaven, what did the disciples say to him? In Acts chapter 1, verse 6, Lord, will you now this time restore the kingdom of Israel? Can just imagine if, what, don't you want, I've been talking to you that it's a spiritual kingdom, it's not an earthly kingdom.

Don't you get it? But they really didn't. Until the Holy Spirit came on them in Pentecost and other things were revealed and they finally got and they started preaching about the reality of the kingdom of God.

[10 : 24] Jesus doesn't want to reign on thrones, he wants to reign in our hearts and minds. That's what it's all about. Jesus knew the pain of being misunderstood.

And those of you who are married know what it's like to be misunderstood. It happens. But Jesus knew it as well. In John chapter 11, we have the story of the raising of Lazarus.

Very interesting story, but there's other parts of it that are kind of interesting. Jesus knew all about that kind of thing, about the pain of grief.

When he got the message that his friend, Lazarus, was sick, he stayed where he was for days and waited till Lazarus was dead.

And then he comes finally to the area and Martha comes to greet him and she says, Lord, if you had been here, he would not have died.

[11 : 26] She had the faith to believe that Jesus could have healed Lazarus. But at that time, she didn't have the faith that Jesus could raise him from the dead. And yet Jesus says to her, I am the resurrection and the life.

The one who believes in me will live even though he die. And whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this? She doesn't quite get it. She says, I believe that you're the Messiah, the Son of God, who's coming into the world.

She believed in a future resurrection, but she didn't quite fully grasp that Jesus could raise her brother from the dead at that moment. Didn't fully understand Jesus, which, as I mentioned, it's not an uncommon phenomenon when Jesus was talking.

People didn't always understand him. So she went and told her sister Mary and called her sister, and the sister Mary came to where Jesus was and got up with her quickly and then she said the same thing.

Lord, if you'd been here, my brother would not have died. When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.

[12 : 45] Deeply moved in spirit and in trouble. Jesus knew the pain of grief. He knew what it was like to lose a loved one. We don't know at what time that he lost his father because what we know is that his father was around when he was 12, but when he began his ministry, his father wasn't there.

So sometime between the age of 12 and 30, his father passed away. We don't know when. So he knew what it was like to lose a loved one. He knew what it was like to lose a friend. He knew the pain and anguish death.

And he knew the finality, the parent finality, terrible. You can even see some anger in this at the whole idea that death has power over us even now.

And then we have the shortest verse in all the Bible and you can easily memorize it if you want. It's verse 35. Jesus wept. How many think you can memorize that verse? Not bad.

So it's, Jesus is moved in spirit. Deeply moved. And then he raises Lazarus from the dead.

[13 : 53] But it goes, Jesus once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was with a cave, cave with a stone laid across the entrance.

He said, take away the stone. And he says, there's a bad odor. He said, did I not tell you if you believe you will see the glory of God? And then he said with a loud voice, Lazarus come out and raised him from the dead.

I know what it's like to lose a loved one. Within the last few months ago, I lost my youngest brother. It's not a pleasant experience. It's not normal that the youngest of nine children would be the first to go.

But it happens. I also knew what it was like to officiate at my own mother's funeral. going, we all, one time or another, are going to know that experience, the pain of grief.

But Jesus knew it as well. Jesus also knew the pain of depression. Depression has been called the everyman illness. Why is that? Because everybody gets depressed at one time or another.

[14:59] The only difference is, is how long you stay depressed. Some people's depression only lasts a few hours. Some it lasts for years and years and years. You know, when you think that someone who could walk on water, raise the dead, and free the multitudes would not get depressed.

But you'd be horribly wrong. Jesus got very depressed. In Matthew 26, 37, it says, Jesus was sorrowful and troubled.

And this hardly expresses the anguish that he felt at that time. In verse 38, he says, my soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.

How many of you have ever got that depressed? Horribly depressed. Luke puts it another way. And it says, well, he's in the Garden of Gethsemane at the same time.

He says, in Luke 22, 44, and being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. That's anguish.

[16:08] That's depression. That's bitterness of spirit. We can't say that Jesus doesn't know how we feel. He felt it very deeply.

Very much so. Jesus knew the pain of depression. In Christ, we say, God is with us in our despair. Jesus also experienced the pain of loneliness. He took with him three friends to that Garden of Gethsemane. The same three friends he took with him. Mount of Transfiguration. His three closest friends.

And he said, pray with me. And they fell asleep. And then he said, also, the little before that, he said to them, all will fall away.

All of you are going to fall away. All of you are going to desert me. And that's what happened. They did. John was the only one that came to the cross. All the other disciples were nowhere near to be found.

[17:13] In his time of greatest anguish, his greatest pain, when we would like to have somebody close by to comfort and strengthen us, all of his friends were gone.

And that wasn't at all. On the cross, he cried out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? We know that no matter if our children desert us or spouses desert us or friends desert us, if everyone leaves us, God is always still with us.

Think of the anguish that Jesus must have felt when he felt that God was no longer with him. and he had a great fellowship with his heavenly father, with his real father.

And yet, it wasn't then. On the cross, it says that Jesus shows us that God is with us in our loneliness. When Jesus was tried before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Roman council, he was found guilty of blasphemy.

He says, blasphemy because you claim to be the son of God. Well, if I claim to be the son of God, that would be blasphemy. But the thing was that Jesus was the son of God.

[18:33] It wasn't blasphemy at all. It was a totally false accusation. He told them exactly who he was. They just didn't believe him. And so, they said, okay, he's worthy of death because blasphemy was a punishable offense under Jewish law.

But the problem was that they were under the Romans at that time. The Romans reserved the right of the death penalty. So, they took him to Pilate, the Roman governor. And, they of course couldn't bring up the charge of blasphemy because Pilate would have ignored it.

But they said, if you were not a criminal, we would not have brought him before you. And they eventually accused him of being a king. and so, and then, interesting enough, they couldn't come into the courtyard, couldn't come right into Pilate's place because they wanted to celebrate the Passover.

They were trying an innocent man, but they were just, didn't want to be ceremonially unclean at the time of the Passover.

That's why Jesus often said, you strain in a gnat and swallow a camel. They were willing to commit a horrible crime, but they didn't want to be ceremonially defiled.

[19:53] So, Pilate was able to, to interview Jesus privately. And he didn't ask, think about blasphemy or whatever. He asked him about the charge of being the king of the Jews.

And, Jesus said, my kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my, my servants would fight, but they're not. My kingdom's not of this world. I'm no threat to you.

So, Pilate said, I find no basis for a charge against this man. Totally innocent. Innocent before the Sanhedrin, but they accused him anyway.

Innocent before Pilate, but they crucified him anyway. Jesus shows us that God is with us when we're victims of injustice. When things are not right, not fair.

All of us are going to go through troublesome times. It happens. But, we can have glory in knowing that other people have gone through the same troubles.

[20 : 55] That God will be with us in this pain. And we know that because Jesus experienced the same pains that we go through. He experienced the pain of estrangement.

He experienced the pain of being misunderstood. He experienced the pain of grief. He experienced the pain of depression, despair. He experienced the pain of loneliness.

And he experienced the pain of injustice. As we go into this new year, we don't know what lies ahead of us. We know what kind of struggles are before us or anything like that.

but we know that God is with us. Jesus said to his disciples, I am with you to the very end of the age. Not just to the end of this year, but to the very end of the age.

Think about that. God is with us. No matter what happens to us, we can take comfort in that God is with us. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.