

Jesus our Emmanuel

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[0 : 0 0] Now, if you have a Bible, perhaps you can turn back with me to Matthew chapter 1.! We're going to think about Jesus, our Emmanuel. What does that mean? Why does that matter? We'll begin with a couple of personal testimonies from very different centuries. We'll begin where I never begin with the story of an American rapper. I'm not really into American rap. But Forrest Frank, Christian rapper, in one of his tracks that I came across this week, he shares his story, I think, really powerfully. He spent one whole year, while he was at university, effectively trying everything, living as wild as he could. In some ways, it sounded a little bit like some of the reflections in the book of Ecclesiastes. So after this year of trying everything he could for happiness, he described the result as a burning emptiness. And that led him to a worship service on campus, where immediately he felt that sense of warmth and peace and community. And very quickly, he came to receive for himself the love of Jesus. Compare that story with St. Augustine, the African theologian of the fourth century. If you've ever read his confessions, then you know he reveals the ancient version of the wild and free life, very similar in many ways to Forrest Frank. And his feeling, after a time, was also of emptiness. You know, he captured it with that idea of the God-shaped hole. Until one day, hearing a voice over a wall saying, pick up and read. He picked up his Bible, and very quickly he came to put his trust in Jesus. And famously, Augustine would say, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you. Divided by hundreds of years, but the same kind of experience, and the same experience of knowing Jesus as Emmanuel, God with us. Jesus as Emmanuel is the promise of peace, and hope, and hope, and life that nothing else offers. And to flip that around, to think about our own time,

Jesus offers what many people around us are seeking. There is an awareness that something is missing, and perhaps they can't quite put their finger on it. You may have had this kind of conversation with a friend or a colleague. You know, the topic of work comes up, or maybe relationships or responsibilities.

Maybe it's just a relentless busyness of life, and often you get that sense, or it's said, I would just love to have some peace. There are lots of people, maybe some of us, struggling in a whole variety of ways, caring for elderly relatives with all the complexities that come with that. Maybe it's the pressure of exams and workload. Maybe it's just the challenge of making ends meet. Perhaps it's the overwhelming sense of responsibilities in general. And again, maybe if you're a Christian here tonight, you've had a friend say to you something like, wow, I wish I had some of your hope.

Your faith must make such a difference in your life. I imagine some of us have had those conversations. And again, Jesus as Emmanuel, as God with us, is the one we want people to know as a source of true hope and peace and comfort. Because we understand in knowing Jesus that the powerful, present, personal God has come to dwell with us and indeed in us. So as we explore the name Emmanuel together, that's what we're going to do for the next few weeks, is think about some of the names of Jesus that we find in the Old Testament and the New Testament. I hope that for us as Christians, they'll strengthen our faith and our thankfulness in this season. But also whoever we are, why ever we've come here, that they'll show why the birth of Jesus represents good news for each one of us. So we're going to look at this a few different ways. First, we're going to begin with the Emmanuel principle. So there's an Old Testament scholar called O.P. Roberts, and he's got a book called Christ of the Covenants, and he talks about the Emmanuel principle. And he says this is foundational to God's covenant promises. The idea that God has intended to dwell with and among his people. That he wants to share fellowship with his people.

[5 : 2 0] That this is actually God's good design for mankind. And so Robertson tells us this is the golden thread that you can trace running right through your Bible. So if you go to the beginning of

your Bible, you discover that God creates, and as God creates, he creates a garden. And he places Adam and Eve within the garden, and they are made in God's image. And they live in God's special garden. And the wonderful thing is that God himself, the creator, he comes to be present. He comes to talk with them.

There is communion. Life at the beginning was God with us. And of course, the tragedy of the garden is that Adam and Eve chose willfully to reject that communion with God, to reject life in God's kingdom, to pursue life on their own terms. And separation came. But God's promise held true. And so you can trace within all the covenant promises to Abraham and then to the nation of Israel along the lines of hearing God saying, I will be your God and you will be my people. That's foundational and central to God's covenant promises. That's why he calls and speaks to pagan Abraham. Didn't know anything about God, but God spoke to him and made great promises. That's why he rescued Israel when they were slaves, surrounded by false gods, and they didn't really know their God. And so he saved them from slavery so that they might enjoy relationship with God. And so wonderfully, as we read the Bible, we discover that human rebellion and human rejection of God is not the final word. That our God is a God of grace. And he promises to act to graciously restore what we have broken. So that for the family, the nation of Israel, they can hear God with us again. And so that promise is there. And with the coming of Christ Jesus, and Matthew tells us this, this is the climax of the Emmanuel principle.

Matthew chapter 1 verse 23, we saw that he was given the name. And as we will come to see, he will be God with us in a whole new way. But perhaps we need to ask the question, why did Jesus become God with us? And we can go just a couple of verses earlier to see a different name of Jesus. Verse 21, you are to give him the name Jesus, which means God saves, because he will save his people from their sins. Jesus has become one of us to be God with us in order to save us from sin. That sin that separates, that rebellion that stops us living in communion with God and in his kingdom. Jesus has come to deal with the problem of us dishonoring our God and turning our back on him to live our own way. And so wonderfully, in Jesus coming and in his work of salvation, we think about the cross and the resurrection, it answers the question, how is it possible that the perfectly holy God of the universe, the one who receives all the worship of heaven, how can he dwell with unholy people? And it answers the question, who is it that can repair the relationship that we have ruined with our God?

And so the climax of this principle, well, it comes with Jesus, but really that the grand finale, and we find that at the end of the Bible, with the return of Christ and the new creation.

Because as we get to the last book of the Bible, we see the Emmanuel principle is still there. The goal of God with us isn't that he would be with us for a moment, but that he would be with his people for all eternity. And when Jesus returns at the end of time to usher in eternity, when all evil is dealt with once and for all, when he establishes his perfect world, then there is a promise.

[9 : 37] Revelation 21, that God's dwelling place is now among the people and he will dwell with them.

They will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God. The Emmanuel principle, God with us for all eternity. Why do we celebrate Jesus, our Emmanuel? Because he brings that hope.

He brings that promise that one day, by faith in him, once again, we will have access to life in God's perfect place, to enjoy life in perfect relationship with him, and we will never lose it, and it will last forever. That's the Emmanuel principle that we find in the Bible. But we also need to see the Emmanuel prophecy. We need to think just for a few minutes about what we read in Isaiah 7, because this name of Jesus, it has a context. And the context for the name of Jesus in Matthew 1 is Isaiah 7. And so we read the story.

We read the story of King Ahaz, the king of Judah, and he's faced with a twin threat. There's the king of Aram, and there's the king of Israel, and they have allied together to wage war on Jerusalem. And for King Ahaz, fear has absolutely set in. And so the Lord God sends Isaiah the prophet to try and give him courage, and to invite him to trust God. And so God through Isaiah says, don't fear their threats.

And compared to the Almighty God, they are nobodies. You will be delivered. And then to take things further, Ahaz is invited to ask God for a sign. We see that a number of times in the Old Testament.

[11 : 38] And whenever the people of God, when they ask for the sign, the sign is always given, and their strength is faith, their faith is strengthened. But Ahaz shows his lack of trust. He thinks like he's being sort of pious and religious. I won't ask God for a sign. But if God tells you to do something, you should always do it. And regardless of Ahaz's lack of faith, God through Isaiah gives his sign.

And the sign is the child, the child to be called Emmanuel. And so there, 700 years before Jesus came, is the answer to the question, how will God show he is present with and for his people? What will be the sign that God is mighty to save and to deliver his people? It's in a promised child with a wonderful name. Now, when the people heard and reflected on this prophecy of Isaiah, it gave them hope that God would give a Messiah and it would be as if God were fighting on their side.

And that, I think, is why when you get to the time of Jesus, the hope of the people of Israel was very much tied to a powerful future military leader. That's what they thought Messiah would be.

And truth is, nobody saw the manger coming. Nobody saw it coming that God would keep his promise literally, that God truly would come to be with us. But it's remarkable that for millennia now, Christians have been strengthened by this promise, especially as we see it worked out in the coming of Jesus. Emmanuel, God is with us. I came across, I know some people have been studying this in school, some of you will be very familiar with Harriet Tubman, others may not know her so much. She was a black woman in America in the 19th century who escaped slavery in the South in the mid-1800s.

[13 : 57] And not content with earning her own freedom and risking much to get to Philadelphia, from that position of freedom, Harriet Tubman then led 13 expeditions heading back into slave territory 13 times to rescue over 300 slaves, bringing them through the Underground Railroad to freedom.

And what was striking, learning about her story and understanding some of the dangers that she faced, is she spoke in her time with absolute confidence that because she was doing God's work, she was not afraid. God is with me, so I will gladly go into enemy territory in order to rescue others. God with us has always been a powerful source of hope and comfort for the people of God. And it is not, because I guess it can sound like, you know, God's with me, can sound to the outsider perhaps as if it's a psychological crutch, well, it's a nice warm blanket kind of feel. It's not wish fulfillment. As a Christian, you know this, it's our lived out experience. It's for us the peace that passes understanding. It's for us the light that shines even surrounded by darkness.

It's the hope that is solid and steadfast, even when everything else seems to be falling apart. And as Christians, in different ways, we know this as our testimony.

[15 : 42] Because it's an invitation into living relationship with the living God. And when we talk about that, when we talk about the reality of a living relationship with the living God, we're inviting people to recognize that there is hope for them too.

Showing that the longing of many hearts can be met, can be met in Jesus. Because the Emmanuel prophecy points us towards, thirdly, the Emmanuel person.

And this is genuinely the truth that nobody saw coming. That God with us would be the child to be born of Mary.

Look at the language that's used in Matthew's gospel. Chapter 1, verse 18. Mary was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit.

And then in verse 20. Here is the angel speaking to Joseph. Do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife. Because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

[16 : 57] The child in the womb of Mary comes through the power of God, the Holy Spirit. Jesus is literally God with us. And all those Old Testament hopes and longings of salvation, of peace, of relationship with God, they narrowed down to a single point.

The child wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. So what are we saying when we say that Jesus is Emmanuel?

Well, we are saying Jesus is God. But we're also saying that Jesus is human. And we're saying that Jesus is God with us.

We're saying that Jesus is God. Just as was reported in the gospel there and through the angels, that the true Father of Jesus is His Father in heaven. The life in the womb of Mary is a miracle of God the creator.

To quote my favorite line of any Christmas hymn from Charles Wesley, Jesus is God contracted to a span, incomprehensibly made man.

[18 : 09] The infinite God, the personal God, is the one who is born and wrapped in those swaddling clothes.

And it's remarkable that it's the Jewish followers of Jesus that recognize Him as God and as Lord. As they witness His miracles, calming storms, healing sickness, raising the dead. As they hear His claims to forgive sin, to be Lord of the Sabbath, claiming I and the Father in heaven are one, claiming that Jesus would return at the end of time to be the judge of all.

That those Jews who are raised to believe that for anyone to even speak the name of God, that was blasphemy. Now to worship? It's a wonderful truth.

They never saw coming, but they gladly embraced because they saw with their own eyes Jesus.

But it's a reminder to each one of us of the importance of grappling with the claim of Emmanuel.

[19 : 25] Because either this is totally ludicrous and far-fetched, or it is some wild deception, or it is totally wonderful truth.

And if true, we need to respond appropriately to it. Jesus is God. But Emmanuel also reminds us that Jesus is human.

And this is a profound and wonderful truth also. Because it tells us that God Himself came to truly identify with us as one of us.

That from Jesus' birth, it is evident that He hasn't come to kind of hover six inches above, that He's not come to the palace, but He's come in order to be the humble, suffering servant.

He comes to face all the challenges that we do. The Bible tells us He faces all the temptations that we face, yet Jesus never sinned.

[20 : 32] And in reality, He knows greater agonies and a greater darkness than we will ever endure. Matthew reminds us that Jesus became Emmanuel in order to save us.

And it's in Jesus' true humanity that He will live a perfect life of obedience. Where we fail, where we fall short, where we rob God of His glory, where we give in to temptation, where we fail to love God and to love our neighbor, Jesus completes perfectly the law of God on our behalf.

And He will then die in our place as our representative, as if He was the worst sinner who ever lived, the only one who never sinned.

because as the angels of heaven sing in revelation, He is the Lamb of God. And that speaks the language of sacrifice, came to take away the sin of the world, came to bear our guilt, our shame, our shortcoming, coming to satisfy the demands of God's justice.

giving hope to all who believe, giving hope to all who believe, giving hope to people like us who have broken relationship with God, at people who in our lives have said no to His rule, that we might, by God's grace, dwell with Him because of His great love.

[22 : 22] So we've said that Jesus is God. We've said that Jesus is human. But we also need to remember that Jesus is God with us. And this takes us, I think, to the Emmanuel promise. I'm going to consider three ways that this speaks promise to us.

And hopefully we can take these with us into the Advent season. I think it speaks to us of the miracle of Christmas. Now, we are used to a plethora of really cheesy Christmas movies, and it sounds like, you know, kind of some sort of sugar sweet Christmas holiday movie, that the miracle of Christmas.

But the miracle of Christmas is this, J.I. Packer puts it so well. The babyhood of the Son of God was a reality.

Nothing in fiction is so fantastic as this truth of the incarnation. And it's so important for us to recognize that this is not just some nice story that, you know, kids dress up and do nativities.

If we embrace this truth, the one that nobody saw coming, the one that is truly too shocking for any Jew ever to make up, if we wrestle with it and accept that the child to be born was none other than the Son of God who took on full humanity, then that makes everything else in his life so much easier to accept.

[23 : 52] You know, if there is a God, and if this God became human, then why couldn't he do miracles? Why couldn't he forgive sin? Why couldn't he rise from the dead?

Here's a second way that this speaks promise to us. It's in the comfort of Christmas. So I say that we're kind of jumping into Advent a little bit early because I guess many of us know I wasn't supposed to be preaching this sermon.

Bob was supposed to be preaching it next week. But then over in the States, he had a really bad arm break and a couple of surgeries, and his recovery process will be slow. And thinking of Bob in the hospital, and then through the surgery, and while he recovers, while he is far from us, then I was thinking about the comfort of Emmanuel.

Because Bob knows God with him, where he is as he convalesces, as he recovers with his sister. And that's true for all of us in the struggles and the situations that we go through.

[25 : 03] And we were talking about it this morning at our breakfast table. That sense of comfort as we, you know, a house move is a, some ways it's got a small thing, but it's kind of a big thing at the same time.

There is comfort to know that God is with us. The reality of Emmanuel has the capacity to bring great comfort.

Because as one of us, Jesus has walked in our shoes, and Jesus himself has suffered.

Jesus lived a life of poverty. Jesus experienced times of loneliness and betrayal. Jesus was falsely accused. He faced hatred and rejection and pain.

But that was nothing compared to what happened on the cross. As the world conspired to say, we don't want God with us, away with that man.

[26 : 05] And as Jesus hung on the cross and the sky turned black, as God's judgment was felt and experienced, and Jesus, the son, lost that sense of the father's presence, and he cried out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

As Jesus dies, bearing the infinite agony of God's wrath poured out on him, we ask ourselves, why? And the answer is so that whoever we are, and whatever we face, if we trust in Jesus, we know the infinite and the personal God, is with us.

And one day, we will have the comfort and joy of life forever in his presence. And that takes us, finally, to the hope of Christmas.

I mentioned Harriet Tubman's story earlier. Just think of that journey. Here is a woman who risked so much to secure her own freedom.

In 1849, by 1850, the US government had changed the legal system to make it even more dangerous. Basically, to be a black person was to run the risk of being kidnapped and taken back to the South.

[27 : 28] There were professional bounty hunters and professional slave catchers, and yet she headed back into slave territory to rescue.

One time, she went back to rescue her niece. Her husband, the niece's husband, in desperation, got in touch and said, she's going to be sold.

Can you do anything? And so Harriet made another one of those journeys to secure her freedom. and life in the family.

In Jesus, our Emmanuel, we understand that in a far greater way, God in Jesus has made that kind of journey. Jesus has come into slave territory.

Without Jesus, we're all bound in the chains of sin. And he has come into the heart of our world in order to set us free by his own death.

[28 : 30] to bring freedom to us. Freedom that we might live in a new family, in the family of God. And having died, Jesus rose again.

And in the victory of his resurrection, we're invited to recognize that there is life, there is love after death. That there is one who is strong enough and capable to deal with the sin, the evil, the death that we see all around us and to give us the promise of a better world to come so we can draw near in faith to the God who in Jesus draws near to us.

do you