

God with us

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[0 : 00] So we're going to be starting at verse 18, we're kind of skipping the genealogy which is Jesus' family tree. Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way.

When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.

But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which means God with us.

When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him. He took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son, and he called his name Jesus. Good morning, everyone.

[1 : 17] It's good to be together, isn't it? Will you pray with me as we come to God's word? Let's pray. Heavenly Father, I pray that your spirit would take your word and press it deep into our hearts, that we might rejoice in the name of Jesus, afresh and all the more.

And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, Christmas corrects the lie about God that has wounded us all.

There's a lie that has wounded all humanity, whether religious or not. And a Scottish pastor has a really great illustration to help us feel this lie.

So imagine there's a father who takes his son to... I remember Toys R Us. Is that still around? It's gone.

Okay. All right. Kmart. Insert your store. Around the shopping centre. A father takes his child, his son, around the shopping centre and just looks at all the toys, going, look at this.

[2 : 33] Isn't this awesome? Oh, yes. I see that, Daddy. I'd love to have one of those. Isn't this cool? Oh, wow. Yeah. That is cool.

Wouldn't you love one of those? And this just goes on for an hour, maybe more. Maybe it's leading up to Christmas time. And then at the end of that hour, the father turns to his son and says, son, all these great things you've seen, you will have none of them.

I want you to know I will not allow you to have a single one of these your entire life. Now let's go home. Now, any kids, this is just a story, okay?

This didn't really happen. No one would ever be that cruel, would they? That would be profoundly wounding for a child, wouldn't it?

They may never recover from that. The child's view of his father would be forever changed. He could never trust him, perhaps never trust anyone.

[3 : 46] When he gets older, I'm guessing he would either want to run as far away from that kind of father as possible or try and live up to the strictness of that father to try and prize some blessings out of him because he's so reluctant.

There's this view of God as that kind of father. That lie entered humanity at the start of human history. That's what Genesis 3 is about.

And the human race is wounded. We're wounded by this false view of God. It's a view of God that deep down we say, if I ever give myself completely over to God, I will be miserable.

I can't trust him to give myself completely to him. Now, I'm going to suggest a few symptoms I've found in my own thinking, in my own attitudes.

Believing this lie, if I give myself to God completely, I'll be miserable. I think I find it when I have this dichotomy in my mind. Either I can serve God or I can do what will make me happy.

[5 : 04] Scripture says there is never a choice. It is always the same thing. But in my head, somehow, I've made a choice. I think it sometimes looks like justifying a course of action.

Someone saying, Scripture, that's the wrong path, David. I know that. I know it's the wrong path. But I don't care. Because I think this path will make me happy.

I see it in me when I'm fretting about my future. I can't just let God take care of my future. I can't completely hand that over to him.

I see it when demanding my circumstances change. Refusing to believe that God in himself can be my peace. He can be my hope.

He can be my life. He can be enough. I've got to have something else. I can't completely just have him.

[6 : 13] I think it can look like being too afraid to come to God with your sins. Like, he doesn't want to see you. He can't handle that. He won't forgive. He won't look after you.

I think sometimes it looks like hanging on to my pride. I have to see myself as a good person.

Because if I'm going to get blessing from God, I have to see myself as righteous.

I can't just let go of that. All these things, I don't know if any of them resonated with you, but we fear to give ourselves completely over to God. So what's going to heal such a deep wound, a false view of what kind of father God is like?

What's going to heal us? One thing, Emmanuel. We've got to see Emmanuel.

We've got to see who God truly is. giving himself completely to us, to have us. And that's what we see in Emmanuel.

[7 : 26] Picture yourself again at the shopping centre, and after the miracle of finding a car park at Charlestown or Qatar or somewhere, you're in the shopping centre, you're hearing the carols come over the speakers, and finally a carols comes over, and you hear that name, Emmanuel.

Why doesn't everyone just stop and drop their presence with fear and amazement, and some people just dropping to the floor?

Why aren't we moved by that name? God with us. It is an incredible claim.

I want to look at three things today of what Emmanuel means from our passage. He is God. He is with us. And he saves us from our sin.

That's what Emmanuel means. So let's go through these things. I hope we see more of Emmanuel today. Well, physically, Jesus is Mary's boy.

[8 : 39] He's a baby. Conceived in, I assume, Mary's fallopian tube. He grew in a womb attached by an umbilical cord, dependent on her blood and nutrients, from the size of a blueberry to an eggplant.

I'm not sure what our third child is up to these days, a cauliflower or something. I don't know.

Kicking her bladder? Physically, Mary's boy.

Matthew's point, we didn't read this, but there's a family tree just before our section, and the point of that is that legally, Jesus is Joseph's boy. God's promises throughout history is that a Jew, a descendant of King David, would be the saviour of the world.

The genealogy shows Jesus is, through Joseph's line, the David, the expected David.

So physically, Mary's boy, legally, Joseph's boy. But this whole section that was read to us is all from Joseph's perspective. We're in his mind.

[9 : 51] We're in his shoes, so to speak. We're meant to feel the crisis. We're meant to feel the crisis. Imagine the personal crisis for him, his future ahead of him.

They're engaged, and she's pregnant. How dashed would he be? He's wrestling.

What do I do with this? He's a godly man. He doesn't just brush the law of God aside. It must be adultery. Like, Mary, you look so godly, but what other explanation is there?

But he's so – he doesn't want to put it to shame. There's this crisis going on. Why are we meant to feel that? Because he's not Joseph's boy.

That's the point. I think that's the point in this section. It's a pretty simple point. Physically, he's Mary's boy. Legally, Joseph's boy. But his deepest identity, his deepest origin, he's Yahweh's boy.

[11 : 08] He's not Joseph's. He's God. He's God's boy. He's God's boy.

Would struggle to believe this claim more than the Jewish culture. If you think of Eastern religions, God is this impersonal thing, a force in everything.

We're kind of like all connected to the divine in some sort of way. If you think of the Greeks and Romans back then, the gods kind of became human in all sorts of ways and pretty crass ways sometimes.

that kind of claim wouldn't be too shocking but he's quoting Isaiah the same Isaiah who's speaking on God's behalf imagine God was he got out his kitchen scales to make some Christmas cookies and you're gonna have to use your imagination here he gets out the scales and for some reason or another all the nations of the world in all the military might are on those scales I don't know how they got there but just come with me in this bizarre illustration it doesn't register on his scales you put all the nuclear warheads on those scales it's not even half a gram to Yahweh behold the nations are accounted as the dust on the scales it don't even register and he's saying this Yahweh has become one of us it's a huge claim he's very God like would you as a grown adult for the adults in the room would you as a grown adult freely choose if if illness didn't make you would you freely choose to be dependent on your parents that they would have to wipe your bottom and give you a bath again that's nothing I'm sorry if that's a bit crass but that is nothing compared to how far Yahweh has come down to be a dependent human being

I'm searching for language here like it's too big to get our heads around isn't it so let's see Emmanuel God is giving himself his eternal son to lower himself as a creature forever forever for you for me that's what Emmanuel means and Emmanuel also means he's with us he's with us in this dark world as as Adam's already open the morning talking about we we didn't read what happens next in the story he enters the world in poverty the straw in the animal feeding trough probably piercing his sides this is not a neat comfortable image

[15:18] Herod King Herod determines to exterminate him killing many other boys just to try and wipe him out he chooses to enter this dark world and experience it firsthand for many Christmas is a joyful time but for a lot it's the most difficult day potentially of the year because you've got the grief of the loved one who's no longer at the table you've got the fear that this could be your last you've got the anger and the despair of the fractured relationships yes you're in the same room but your world's apart you've got the loneliness and we've got the evil at Bondi Beach

Christmas tells us God hasn't given up on his evil world Emmanuel means he's come into the darkness he's tasted it firsthand he's experienced it all of it we all know the difference when you're going through a hard time we all know the difference when someone who's trying to be kind is trying to sympathise with you but then someone comes who's been through the same thing you know the difference don't you they really do know what you're going through they understand Jesus knows the loneliness of being abandoned by all he knows it he knows family rejection his village tried to drive him off a cliff he knows temptation to be unfaithful when you're really hard situation and you just you just want to escape it he knows unjust treatment he's come in Emmanuel means he's come in and he's tasted the suffering firsthand now it doesn't explain the reason for my suffering your suffering it doesn't give you an explanation for it but it tells you what it isn't it can't mean

God doesn't care it can't mean he's remote because God totally gave himself to be with us in all the evil and all the grief of this world and all the temptation of this world that's how far he's come so Emmanuel let's see Emmanuel God come down Emmanuel he's with us in this dark sinful world and Emmanuel he saves his people from their sins Isaiah the prophet who Matthew quotes here 800 years before Jesus in Isaiah's day that sign was awful news God was going to show up before this child comes of age through military foreign power to punish his people for their sins the angel announces to Joseph the good news for us today

Emmanuel now means he will save his people from their sins now that's only good news if we know our sin I feel a bit sorry for Joseph there's almost no Christmas carol we didn't sing a Christmas carol about him last night we had one about Mary but we've got a whole section of the Bible here about Joseph and nothing he's a really good man he's an admirable guy he thinks Mary's broken the law of God and he's faithful to the law of God he can't just ignore it and push it aside but then he's not self-righteous he's not trying to punish Mary he's trying to quietly divorce her he doesn't want to it seems but even this good man

Joseph needs to accept that he needs a saviour to rescue him from the power of his sin there was a British atheist Francis Buffett who once said about anyone who pauses to reflect on themselves honestly he said this you discover yourself as a being who does not fit easily with your own wishes a being who acts against yourself as often as you act for yourself who is resistant to your own best intentions who whatever the line is that your society and you yourself draw between the good and

the bad are some of the time voting haplessly on both sides of it can you resonate I can resonate with that in 1961

[21 : 24] Adolf Eichmann he was the first lieutenant in the SS World War II he was the mastermind behind the death camps and he was put on trial and a man called a survivor you healed in all he came to testify against him and when he saw him he collapsed on the floor and he was sobbing and he fainted which you could imagine but 22 years later Jehiel was interviewed on 60 Minutes and he showed the clip of him falling apart in the courtroom and he was asked what was going through his mind at that point was it hatred were you just overwhelmed with fear was it the trauma coming back and Jehiel said no no no he said

I came in and I looked at Eichmann and I realised this is not a demon this is someone just like me and if he's capable of doing this so am I and he's famous for this line Eichmann is in all of us he's a survivor he said Eichmann is in all of us he was facing himself every other religion says here's what you got to do to find God here's what you do Emmanuel says God came down to find you he came down to save us from the power and the punishment of sin he is one day going to get rid of all evil he's going to remake this world and when he does that he won't have to end you because he's already taken your sin he's come to save us from our sin so that we are free to enjoy

God with us forever Joni Erickson Tata a quadriplegic was asked by Billy Graham to paint a picture of Mary and Jesus if we could do we have that yeah thanks so you'll see Mary's knees transition into the hills where this Emmanuel will go to save us from our sins she was inspired by a poem by Lucy Shaw to know my darkness ended brought to this birth for me to be newborn and for him to see me mended I must see him torn do you see

Emmanuel giving all of himself to us well the angel says to Joseph do not fear do not fear to take Mary and the implication of him taking Mary do not fear to take Jesus what did Joseph have to fear well he had to fear the loss of his self image as a good and decent person if he takes Jesus in that traditional moral community everyone's going to assume he's the father let's face it kiss his good reputation!

Goodbye! They're going to be treated as a bit of a scandal he's got to embrace that but more than just the false reputation from others he's got to embrace what the angel says that he really isn't a good man he might be decent but he's not a good man he will need this child to save him from his sins don't fear to take him don't fear to lose that image of yourself as good he will give you something so much better forgiveness Joseph do not fear to lose your self control your authority you all know we've got a son due in March and we've got a short list of names and

[26 : 43] Colin made a deal with us when sorry Colin I'm throwing you under the bus here when he was cutting the carpet squares of the tiles he made a deal with us that if you cut them perfectly we might just have a Colin bot in our midst come March!

you don't name this child he names you don't fear to take him but if you embrace Jesus Joseph give up all your authority this child comes into your life and he's going to totally take over and that is great news that's wonderful news because he's much better at running your life than you are don't fear to lose your sense of control brothers and sisters let me end with this do not fear to take Jesus don't fear to give yourself completely over to him no boundaries no no no conditions there's only one way you and

I will do that if we see Emmanuel let him heal that wound in your heart see the light flood in to expose that lie of the kind of God he is he's the kind of God who gives all of himself to us to have us Emmanuel giving all of himself for us to have us forever to be with us forever if you see Emmanuel you don't need a fear let's let's completely give ourselves over to him will you pray with me let's pray father in heaven you know each of our hearts you know where we're fearing to trust you where we just can't let go or we're in too much pain

Lord I pray that you would press the truth of Jesus come down to be with us in the darkness to rescue us from the darkness so that we might be healed and mended forgiven and made new forever with you Lord please press Emmanuel deep into each of our hearts forgive us for having a false view of you please fill us with a true view of you this Christmas that we may trust you and have joy in you and make choices that honour you pray this in Jesus name Amen