

# Jesus is Immanuel

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Date: 17 December 2023

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     Okay, thanks so much Jesse for that. Welcome to everyone in the room. As Jesse said, my name is Elliot. I'm one of the pastors here at One Harbor New Bern.

And it's so exciting to be with you both for those here in the room and anyone listening online. I pray these words find you well in Jesus. And so we're currently moving through a sermon series that takes us through the season of Advent.

And Advent is just a word that means the coming or arrival in which we remember and celebrate this arrival of the long-awaited Messiah that has been promised.

And I think in that fashion, it's such a great and relevant season because, you know, we're not only looking back to the one who has come, but we're awaiting him to return, right?

So for a follower of Jesus, really our entire Christian lives are lived in this world kind of in a state of Advent, right? And this tension between the way things are and the way they're going to be, between what we've been given and what we're hoping to be given in the future, where we've placed our hope.

[ 1 : 0 9 ]     And we're doing that by this particular Advent season by looking at a particular name that is given to Jesus, and that is the name Emmanuel, which simply means God with us.

Now, if you were here last week, Jesse did this great job of taking us through the first time the name Emmanuel shows up in Scripture, which is really kind of in a not expected place in the book of Isaiah.

And when that passage resolves, you get this idea of Emmanuel, God being with us, but it really kind of leaves it as a mystery, like it doesn't fully clarify who that's going to be or what he's going to be like.

And so it's kind of left in abeyance, and then we get, we're going to flash forward today where that mystery is going to be revealed in probably a place that we think of kind of a more traditional Christmas-type place, the birth of Jesus.

And so that's what we're going to be looking at today. And this idea of God being with us is really important, not just to the story we tell at Christmas, but I would argue to all of life.

[ 2 : 1 8 ]     Because for everybody in this room, there are two questions that every human on the planet is going to have to ponder at some point. And one of those is, does God exist?

And if he does, what is he like? And so much of what your life is going to be or not going to be is dependent on how you answer those questions. What we're going to see today is if there's no God with us, it becomes really difficult to ever have any definitive answers to those questions.

So in 1961, the Soviets launched Yuri Gagarin into orbit. He became the first human to go into space. And after that launch was successful, the Soviet propaganda machine, which was really set on kind of belittling and ridiculing any type of religious thought, like use that as an opportunity to make this declaration that, hey, our cosmonauts have gone into space and they did not find God there.

Ha ha. You know, kind of the idea that, you know, as the boundaries of science push forward and we learn more things necessarily, we're going to find more and more that God's not actually there, right?

C.S. Lewis, a few years after that event, actually wrote an essay about it when he gave kind of a response, a few of his thoughts. And part of that, he said this, kind of thinking about what the Russians had said.

[ 3 : 49 ] He said, you know, looking for God or for heaven by exploring space is a little like reading or seeing all of Shakespeare's plays and hoping that you're going to find Shakespeare as one of the characters or Stratford where he wrote the plays as one of the places.

The Bible uses a word to describe God and that word is holy. And the word holy simply means completely other, something different, outside of space and time.

And what C.S. Lewis is saying there is like, if that's really the case, it's kind of silly to think that we were expecting that you would find God in space, right? Like you're no more likely to find God in space than you are if you were one of Shakespeare's characters to expect to run into Shakespeare in the story, right?

Like he's the author. He's something different. He's outside of that. And if that's the case, if that's really the relationship that God has to his creation, then the truth is there's no way for you to know anything about him unless the author decides to write himself into the story, which is in fact exactly what happens in scripture.

So we're going to look today at Matthew chapter one. If you have your Bibles, you can turn there. If not, no worries. It's going to be on the screen behind me. And this is a passage that's going to open up with a genealogy of Jesus.

[ 5 : 22 ] As a matter of fact, the first words in this passage are the book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. And so that word genealogy actually kind of even harks to the word of Genesis.

Like this passage is a call to both the history of what has been, but it's also really made to make you think about a new beginning.

And then for the first 16 verses of Matthew one, it goes to this list of characters that were in the story, right? Like people that were part of this genealogy and we'll get back to them in a second.

And in verse 17, it pops in and kind of gives us the big picture and says, so all the generations from Abraham to David were 14 generations and from David to the deportation to Babylon, 14 generations.

And from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ, 14 generations. 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.

[ 6 : 30 ] 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 of 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 Isaiah.

Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which means God with us. And when Joseph woke from that sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him.

He took his wife, but he knew her not until she gave birth to a son and they called his name Jesus. Jesus, this is God's word to us. So here we see in Matthew the arrival of what was prophesied in Isaiah, this long awaited Messiah.

And one of the first things that jumps out to us is he's actually got a lot of different names, right? So he's given two particular names in this passage. And one of them, if you've ever been around a church context at all, is probably the one you're most familiar with Jesus.

[ 7 : 49 ] Jesus. Jesus is simply a name that means God saves. God will save his people from their sins. The name Jesus tells us what he does.

But we also get another name here, which is this Emmanuel, which means God with us, which tells us who he is. And that's why this name is so important in terms of if we're going to see what God's like, God being with us is so critical to that.

And so today we're going to look at a few things here. And I think the first one that God with us shows us is that it shows us what God is like. So if he has come to be with us, like to be with us, then obviously we get to learn something about him.

And I think the first thing that becomes very clear is that the God who has come to be with us has a humble heart. So all throughout scripture, you've seen these pictures that have tried to like as various men of God have got these images of what God is.

And it's always depicting him like in his throne room or with like these powerful beings around him. And they really struggle to describe it. Like it's so majestic. You know, they have to use, well, it's kind of like a burning fire or it's kind of like, you know, something that glows or it's kind of light like, or it looks sort of like they had wings or whatever.

[ 9 : 17 ] It's just beings of immense power. And at the center of all of that, all of that creation is still declaring to the God who sits on the throne. Holy, holy, holy.

Like you are still high above all that, like completely different, unfathomable in how big and powerful he is. And yet when he comes to be with us, he doesn't come in power.

He comes in weakness as a baby in a manger. I mean, think about that. That is amazing. That means he gets hungry. Like he feels cold when it's cold outside.

He's got to go to the bathroom. He grows and learns like we do. That's not what we would expect.

I mean, even if we're not able to understand all of this great mystery of what it means for someone to be like fully God and fully man, the one thing we can say for sure is this is probably not how we expected that God on high to show up.

[ 10 : 25 ] He doesn't show up in power. You know, I think one of the questions that people, you know, when they're pondering God or kind of larger questions in life, one of the questions they ask is, you know, if God wants everybody to know him, why doesn't he just show up?

Right? Like, like if God wanted the whole world, if he's really that big and powerful, I mean, he could just split the sky, right? Like he could come and manifest himself right now in this place in a way that no one in here would be left with any doubt that God exists, right?

Like why doesn't he do that? And truly, you know, to like fully explore that is probably a longer road than you can touch on in one sermon. But I will say this, I think the way that God comes shows us a big clue about why God comes in the way he does.

I heard a pastor years ago tell a story about someone he had known that was kind of in a POW concentration camp type scenario. And he said, one of the things he learned from that is kind of the limits of, of what you can do with power.

And he said, it's, it's surprising and it's different than you would think it would be. He said, so, you know, no matter how strong your will is, you'd be surprised by the application of power, right? Coercion, pain, you know, manipulation.

[ 11 : 47 ] You can make people do a lot of things that they think they wouldn't do. You can make them eat things they thought they'd never eat. You can make them turn on their friends. You can make them deny their God.

You can do a lot of things with kind of the, the raw application of power. But he said, you know, there's one thing you can never do with power and that's you can never make someone love you by applying power.

You can make them pretend like they love you, but you can't actually make them love you. And so, you know, I think you're right. I think part of this is God can come and make everyone believe tomorrow.

But again, throughout scripture, we see images of beings that believe in God. It says demons and Satan, they all believe, but they have no part in him, right? So I would submit to you that maybe that's not exactly what God is after.

I think Paul teases this out in Philippians chapter two a little bit, speaking to that church. He says, do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility, count others more significant than yourselves.

[ 12 : 59 ] Let each of you look not only to his interest, but also to the interest of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus. So the mind that Christ has, who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

And so I would submit to you that maybe God's ultimate goal for his children isn't just for you to get you to believe that he exists, but maybe it's to get you to love like he does, to be like he is.

I mean, this verse demonstrates, it says, to have the same heart as Christ Jesus, right? Like to be humble like him who counted others greater than himself.

And that's how God demonstrates to us. That's how he comes, not in power, but in humility. And if that's the case, I think it shows us something even more beautiful about God, which is simply this.

God loves us up close. It shows us that, you know, if God's going to come and live with us, you know, it's this idea of incarnating, like being where someone is.

[ 14 : 18 ] That tells you that God is not content to just send you gifts from afar, to like, you know, send you a postcard, love you, mean it, right? And like come from anywhere.

He comes to love up close. And it's no coincidence that that's often when we are followers of Jesus, the ministries that have the most impact, when you are willing to go where someone is, right?

Like you sit with them in their sorrows. You come close to where you are. We love like God loves when we come close.

There's something else in here, too. Like if you think back, so, you know, we didn't read all those names in the genealogy. But if you go and look at them, again, you're going to see a myriad of stories across the Old Testament.

But one thing that kind of jumps out to you, this like list of people that is the human genealogy of Jesus is, it is full of scoundrels. And I don't mean scoundrels like, oh, they were a little naughty, they taught a white line.

[ 15 : 20 ] I mean scoundrels like if they were in the room right now, it would make you nervous. Like you would wonder why that person is not in jail. And yet, that is the family line that Jesus willingly inherits.

He willingly chooses to associate himself with us like that because he wants for us to be associated with his family, to be adopted into his family.

That's loving up close. I'm going to become part of that broken family so that you can be part of mine. We know what God is like because he came and he put on flesh and he dwelt among us.

He wanted to draw close to us then and he still wants to draw close to us now. And he wants the world to come to know him through that. God being with us certainly teaches us something about him.

But it also teaches us something else. God with us shows us that he also knows a little bit what it's like to be us. So even if God does come down and he's with us and he's here and we get to see something about who he is, that's glorious.

[16:37] But we're actually left with a little bit of a problem relationally. And to be frank, it's kind of an us problem, right? Like it's not you, God, it's me, right? Because even if he's here with us, ultimately we're still going to feel a little bit distant because how could you ever measure up to that, right?

Like how can you ever have a real relationship with a God that's perfect, right? I mean, maybe you can see a little bit in this of like if you've ever had a friend or an acquaintance that was just so much more talented than you were, like just a different level or, you know, so much more attractive or so much more wealthy, right?

Like you can imagine if you had a famous friend, like a friend that was a movie star, like even if they were nice enough, right, but you didn't live in that world, there's always a part of you that feels a little distant, right?

Partly because we're just insecure people, right? And anytime there's some other kind of greatness, we feel like, you know, we just feel a little self-conscious. But also because I think there's a piece of us that just goes, how could they ever really know what it's like to be me?

And if you hang around them long enough, you'd probably worry that eventually, even if they're not trying to do it, you would just feel like you couldn't measure up, right? Or maybe they're secretly kind of sick of you, right, like my poor pitiful friend who can't measure up to who I am.

[18:07] Now, I think one of the ways, you know, if that's the case with humans, how much more would that be the case with a perfect God, right? And I think one of the ways we try to get around that is we try to diminish God, right?

So, you know, we try to imagine him down to our size, right? So we start to think, you know, like what if God's not quite, like what if he was just, you know, one of us, you know, like a slob, like one of us.

You remember that lyrics, like that kind of thing? Or we, you know, we use terms like, you know, he's the man upstairs, right? Which is kind of a way of saying like, you know, just a more powerful version of our messed up selves, right?

Like somebody who actually is kind of flawed and fickle like us makes us feel a little better about it. But the problem is we've already seen you can't do that with God.

He's not God with us in that way. He is still holy. He is the author. Like you can't bring him down to your size so you feel more comfortable with him.

[19:12] So what are we going to do? I mean, how are we ever going to draw close to him? Like, isn't he just going to be perpetually dissatisfied with us?

And that's what we might feel tempted to feel. But amazingly, all throughout scripture, that is not what we see from this God who's come to be with us. Over and over and over, we see that as he draws close to us, it doesn't foster disgust.

It creates compassion. He actually said this quite a bit in the Old Testament before Jesus in Psalm 103. It says this, speaking about this God who's come.

The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever.

He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love towards those who fear them.

[ 20 : 18 ] Even in his love, he is holy. He is not like us. He doesn't love like that. As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear them. Now watch this, for he knows our frame. He remembers that we are dust.

He is under no illusion as to what his image bearers are, and yet he still wants to move in compassion towards that. And when he comes to be with us, now that we have God with us in living color, that compassion comes forward even more, because his proximity to our brokenness doesn't dampen his love for us at all.

As a matter of fact, it inflames it. It's hard to find a verse in the Bible that says it better than this one in Hebrews chapter 4. It says, He's our advocate.

And it says, Our advocate is not some hired hand. It is someone who knows because he's been us. He is us. He knows what our weaknesses are.

[ 22 : 01 ] And he advocates in compassion before the Father. I mean, that's an encouraging thought to think day after day as whatever you feel your life is going, Jesus is standing before the Father and asking for love and compassion.

Friends, don't let a picture you've painted in your head of a God who is always disappointed with you keep you from coming to him.

Because God has come to be near us. But that's not what he's like. Being near us has not pushed him away.

It's drawn him in all the more. God with us shows us that he knows what it's like to be us. And lastly, I think God with us shows us how far God will go in his love for us.

So central to the story of God coming to be with us is this idea that he will go as far as he has to go and he will pay as much as he has to pay. It's an amazing thing that makes no sense.

[ 23 : 09 ] You kind of see that writ large when we get to the Easter story, right? Like when Jesus is crucified, when the Father gives his only begotten son for us. But I think there's also a place for this at Advent.

Because what's really easy to miss in the story of the Messiah coming is that there was also a story of the going. There was a gentleman named Hudson Taylor, lived in the 1800s.

He was a minister and missionary in England. And across the course of his life, he really felt led by God to just devote his life to going to China and to reaching the Chinese people with the gospel.

And if you study his life, it's one of those that, man, can really be faith-stirring. Like the way he prayed, the way he trusted God, what he was willing to change about himself. Like he really did it right.

You know, he went the whole way. But there's one chapter from his life that's really always stuck out in my mind. And he recorded in his journal. And it's this excerpt where he's talking about the few moments as he's getting ready to board a ship for his, you know, to go to China.

[ 24 : 18 ] Like his first voyage to China. And he recorded those last moments that he was there with his mother. And this is what he wrote in his journal. He said, my beloved, now sainted mother had come over to Liverpool to see me off.

And never shall I forget that day nor how she went with me into the cabin that was to be my home for nearly six months. With a mother's loving hand, she smoothed the little bed. And she sat by my side and we joined in the last hymn we should sing together before parting.

And we knelt down and she prayed the last mother's prayer I was to hear before leaving for China. And then notice was given that we must separate and we had to say goodbye, never expecting to meet again on this earth.

And for my sake, she restrained her feelings as much as she could. And when we parted, she went ashore giving me her blessing. And I stood alone on the deck. And she followed the ship as we moved towards the dock gates.

And as we passed through the gates and the separation really commenced, never shall I forget the cry of anguish that rung out from my mother's heart. It went through me like a knife.

[ 25 : 32 ] I never knew so fully until that moment what for God so loved the world meant. And I am quite certain that my precious mother learned more of the love of God for the perishing in that one hour than in all her life before.

God coming to be with us isn't just like a heartwarming Christmas story. It is the ultimate expression of how much God loves us. It cost him everything.

He sent his son into a world that he knew would reject him. The most precious thing he had. And because of that, we know there's no length to what he won't go.

Romans 8.32 says this, He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not then also with him graciously give us all things?

You know, in a room like this, it's impossible to know just all of the weight of the precious stories of all the lives in here. I mean, just if each one of you were to come up and tell your story, you know, I think we would all be amazed.

[ 26 : 49 ] But it's impossible to know your story. And particularly, it's impossible to know. I have no idea what pain and sorrow and disappointment you've been through in your life.

But whatever you're inclined to think about the reasons for that, about the reasons for the trials you've been through, I would say that God being with us tells us at least one thing.

Whatever that reason is, it cannot be because God doesn't love you. And I think this verse in Romans is here because it is and it will always be tempting to believe that God doesn't care, is holding out, could do more, but he's not.

It's the same accusation that Satan came against the first humans, Adam and Eve, with, right? It was, you know, you've been given all these good blessings, but God's holding out on stuff.

Why is he holding out? What is he not telling you? But standing against that lie is now this picture of a God who has come to be right here with us, who's left nothing on the table, who just like Hudson Taylor's mother, has given the best he has in heartache so that we might be reconciled.

[ 28 : 11 ] There's nothing else he can give. If he's given the best to come and love up close, how will he not give us all things? He came to be with us, and he wants to be with us forever.

As the band comes up today, if you're here and you're not a follower of Jesus, again, man, just welcome. Thank you for being with us. I would say this.

If you feel isolated or alone or you wonder if God could care, I would say he can be God with you. That's what he came to do.

He can be the God that saves from whatever you're in. And I would just say to you, like, if any of that resonates, no matter where you've been or what you've done or what you've gotten into, he is still the God that loves up close.

He wants you to be close to him. We're going to, as we close, we'll have a prayer on the screen that can maybe be a way you can express that. Or if you want to come and pray with someone, we'd love to talk with you about it.

[ 29 : 18 ] But don't leave here believing that God isn't for you, that he's not come to love you. If you are a follower of Jesus, then maybe this is just an opportunity to let that truth that he's come and be with us kind of wash over you a little bit, right?

Like, maybe you've been tempted to think that he's nothing but disappointed with you. And this is a good morning to repent of that. And the word repent isn't a word that carries the baggage of shame.

It simply means to stop thinking that way, to stop walking that way, and to agree with what God says, that he actually loves you, that he's actually delighted because of what's been made possible in Jesus.

Maybe you've been tempted to think that God has forgotten you, that he doesn't see, that he doesn't care. You know, the Bible actually gives this vivid picture image of it, and it's almost like an exclamation when it's talking about, can God forget you or not care?

He says, can a mother forget the child nursing at her breast? Right? Like, and if you've been a nursing mother, then obviously you know, like, how impossible it would be, notwithstanding your love for the child, but also that, like, if they're actually nursing at your breast, how impossible it would be to forget your love.

[ 30 : 34 ] And he said, it's more likely that that would happen, that I would forget you. God won't forget us. Let's go ahead and stand together.

We're going to take communion. For those of us, if you're in the room and you're a follower of Jesus, you're welcome to take communion with us.

And communion is a moment that Jesus has given us, again, to remember that he was with us and is with us. And it is a moment we remember, but it can also be a moment, like, one of the things you can do in communion is actually ask him, God, right now in this moment, remind me, like, come and be with me, not just words on a page, but God in my heart.

Like, come into that place that I don't think you can get in. It's a moment that you can maybe ask for faith to say, God, help me to believe you're going to be God with me to the end of it, for all my days and beyond.

So the Bible tells us to examine our hearts. Like, this is just a moment before him to say, Holy Spirit, if there is anything, any way I'm thinking about this, anything I'm doing that's separating us, then just please forgive me and help me to move from that.

[ 31 : 53 ] And to trust that he is a faithful God, because of his great love, he will remove our sins from the east is from the west. So just take a moment and examine when you're ready.

Take the elements back to your seat and partake of it. And I would say partake of it, as it said in Hebrews, with confidence, not worried, like, am I worthy of this? Because your advocate, Jesus, stands before the Father right now.

You are welcome in his presence. Eat of it in faith. Father, we give this moment to you. Please let your spirit be the guide in this moment.

Have your way. Help our hearts to see how much you love us. Move anything out of the way that is testifying to something different.

God, we can't do that unless you help us. We need you in all things. Please come in this moment. We ask that in Jesus' strong name. Help me for this moment.

[ 32 : 55 ] Thank you.