

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (20-12-1998 Guisborough Evangelical Church)

Matthew 1:23
Emmanuel, God with us

Isaiah 7:10-14, Matthew 1:18-25

Introduction

Giving of names in Bible times of immense importance. Parents used names to express what they wanted to remember or symbolize. When God bestowed a name, it was a revelation. “Moses” – I drew him out of the water; “Samuel” – Asked of God; “David” – Beloved; “John” – God is gracious; “Jesus” – Saviour; “Christ” – Anointed One. Now, “Emmanuel” – God with us. As far as we know Jesus was never actually called “Emmanuel”. Rather it signified his importance and meaning. The Divine finger is pointing to the baby and saying, “Remember this baby means I am with you”.

In Jesus, God Himself came right where we are. Jesus brought God’s presence to men. Going to consider this amazing but glorious truth that God is with us. Throws light on the person and the work of Christ (in past and present).

God is with us in the Person of Jesus Christ

In Old Testament days God had many times come close to His people. Spoke through angel when Abraham about to slay Isaac **Because you have not withheld your son, I will surely bless you** (Genesis 22:16,17). To Jacob at Bethel, He said, **I am with you and I will watch over you wherever you go** (Genesis 28:15). He showed His presence by the pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night as Israel travelled to Promised Land (Exodus 13:21). God spoke to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:16), to Gideon (Judges 6:14), and to the boy Samuel (1 Samuel 3:11). The Psalmist was able to say **Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for you are with me** (Psalm 23:4). Cannot escape God’s presence – in heaven, in grave in Sheol, uttermost parts of the sea.. God is there (Psalm 139). So also Jonah’s discovery when he tried to escape from God (Jonah 1).

Promises of God’s presence – to Joshua **As I was with Moses, so I will be with you** (Joshua 1:5). **When you pass through the waters I will be with you** (Isaiah 43:2). So it is constantly in the Old Testament – the presence and nearness of God, leading, speaking, protecting, supporting. Those who knew His presence experienced the strength and encouragement which Divine presence brings.

But when Jesus was born, God took one step further, an unprecedented step. God, in the second person of the Trinity, conceived of the Holy Spirit (the third person) and born of the Virgin Mary. **The eternal Word of God became flesh and dwelt among us** (John 1:14).

Need to be very clear about the person of Christ. He was not merely the greatest man that ever lived, nor was he a man who was especially conscious of God. Nor an angel

come to earth. Nor half man, half God. He was one person – fully God and fully man. This is a foundation truth, and if we miss this, we miss the essentials of the Person of Christ.

He was one with the Father and the Holy Spirit in the Godhead. Yet also man – had body, soul, mind, memory – all that makes a rational man. The second Adam. Like us in every way apart from sin.

Two natures were united in this one person. **Before Abraham was born, I am** (John 8:58). This is the great and wonderful mystery about Christ- knowing what was in man, forgiving sins, working miracles, assigned to be men’s judge, yet hungry, thirsty, tired, suffering, dying. **Christ is God over all** (Romans 9:5). **The man, Christ Jesus** (1 Timothy 2:5).

*“Christ by highest heaven adored,
Christ the everlasting Lord.
Late in time, behold him come,
Offspring of a virgin’s womb.”*

*“Lo, within a manger lies,
He who built the starry skies”*

*“Our God contracted to a span.
Incomprehensibly made man”*

Why emphasize this? This is truth, and we honour God by believing His truth. Also, these things are blatantly denied, for example, the Jehovah’s Witnesses. Even some theologians in mainline churches, assure their followers they can still be Christians even if they deny Christ’s deity. Even the secular press are dismayed by these denials by those who are expected to uphold them.

Our salvation depends on this great truth that God was in Christ. The Saviour had to be man, because he had to bear man’s sin and penalty. He had to be God, sacrifice of infinite value and able to meet man’s greatest needs. Stop to admire the amazing act of condescension – Creator and creature, God and Man, eternity and time, immortal and mortal - becoming one. The Lord of glory took the step of greatest humiliation when he took mortal flesh in the womb of the Virgin Mary. We have no idea of the amazing stoop when the Eternal Son dwelt in our human flesh. Miracle of power, grace and humility.

God is with us in Salvation

And why did God become man? Why did the second person of the Trinity take human flesh in womb of Virgin Mary? Why did He live here on this earth for 33 years? That we might be saved and enjoy again His fellowship and blessing. One thing is obvious in the Bible and proved in our experience – God is not with us by nature. God and man do not have anything to do with each other. Sin has separated us. By nature we are strangers, enemies, divided by a dividing wall, an impassable gulf.

But God has come in Christ that all that must be changed. Because Christ has come and died on the Cross, sin has been borne, price has been paid, justice has been done. Wall of separation is broken down. River is bridged. Children of wrath become children of God. Enemies are now friends. Those far off are brought near. God can now be with us, we can know him, we can be in His family, talk to Him, know His hand on our lives, experience His blessing, walk with Him as Enoch did, talk with Him as friend with friend, as Moses.

This is especially true when, as a company of people, we meet in praise and worship. Not just meeting for hymn singing and to hear a man spinning his own ideas about religion. But, if in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, we know He is with us in blessing and power and life changing energy. Also at the Table, where He is present in power. The Lord comes down and is amongst us.

Emmanuel – God with us in Salvation, with all its attendant blessings. Because Christ has died.

Matthew Henry: “By light of Nature, God is above us; by light of the Law, God is against us; by light of the Gospel, God is with us.” **And if God is for us, who can be against us? Who shall bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is at the right hand of God, who is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?** (Romans 8:31-35). Do you know this truth? Know him? Know your sins forgiven? Walk with Him? Is God with you? Or is He against you?

God with us in all experiences of life and all our circumstances

This is always the point where everyone – even people of the world – pick up their ears. Want to hear this. Use Him as last arm to lean on in trouble, difficulty, bereavement. These are the circumstances which cause the most hardened to pray – to turn at least for a short time to God. But notice – God has covenanted to be only with His people, those whom He first of all was with in Salvation. They can count on Him in trouble, and be sure of it.

God is not there to serve us. We are here to serve Him. He is not here to be used to see us through and achieve our self-centred aims and ambitions, then quietly dropped after He has served His purpose till next emergency. Cheek and arrogance of it all!

We can have God's blessings and presence on His terms. The Psalmist pleads for God's help and support and protection on these grounds, **For I am your servant** (Psalm 143:12). Need to belong to God, loved by Him, longing to do His will. When we belong to the Lord we can always rely on Him for presence, help and support. When we are the Lord's people, He will never leave us or forsake us. He will be with us as we pass through the waters. Isaiah 41:10 contains seven wonderful assurances - (1) **Fear not**, (2) **I am with you**, (3) **Be not dismayed**, (4) **for I am your God**, (5) **I will strengthen you**, (6) **Yes, I will help you**, (7) **I will uphold you with my righteous right hand**.

The Lord has been through all our experiences – weariness, loneliness, sorrow, slandered, betrayed, stormy seas. He is a High Priest who can sympathize with our weaknesses, therefore we can come boldly to the throne of grace.

The new year may hold for us sorrow, trouble, infirmity, disappointment – unlikely that we will get off scot-free. Pile up the promises God has made. **I will never never** (οὐ μὴ) **leave you. I will never, never, never** (οὐδ’ οὐ μὴ) **forsake you** (Hebrews 13:5). So we may boldly say **In God I trust, I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?** (Psalm 56:11). **I will be with you always, to the very end of the age** (Matthew 28:20). And if life on earth should end for us, and if we are the Lord’s people and go into the great unknown and eternity, we have this promise **Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me, your rod and your staff, they comfort me** (Psalm 23:4)

Last words of John Wesley “Best of all, God is with us”. C.A.Knox, early Keswick speaker, dying of cancer of the tongue, could only write notes. Just before the end he wrote “I want you to know that when you come to this, as long as you have Christ, you have nothing to fear.”

Conclusion

Emmanuel – God with us. In His person, He is God with us. God the Son took our humanity from the Virgin Mary. God Man – perfectly and truly God, perfectly and truly man.

As a result of His coming and because of His atoning death on the Cross, sin can be forgiven, and instead of God being against us, He is now with us in Salvation. We are brought into His family, and His Spirit enters our lives. He is both *with* us and *within* us.

Then, if we are His, He is with us to comfort, sustain, work out His purposes, and keep us to the end and beyond. And even the last enemy will not have the final word – God will be with us.

With such assurances, do not let our hearts be troubled or afraid. No one can snatch us out of His hand. Thank Him for the gift of Christ, and the gift of Salvation, and all the blessings which follow from it. Trust Him with your fears, sorrows and troubles. Do not despise Him. Keep nothing back. He is our sympathetic High Priest. Come to Him without question or hesitancy. He comes to us, tenderly, gently and kindly.

Is God with us all? – what a happy Christmas that would be if it were so. If God would be with me, I must be with Him. Let us be with God, because God is with us. Yield lives to Him, bow knee to Him, ask Him to accept us and receive us for His Son’s sake.