Sermon- Emmanuel, God is by your side

Scripture: Matt 1:22-23 Sunday, December 24, 2017

Advent is almost over, Christmas is just around the corner. As we waited for this day, my last two sermons were on how the Christmas stories shows us in a special way how God uniquely speaks to each one of us about Himself. Last Sunday I shared with you all about how the birth of Christ was predestined according to God’s big plan and yet each person in the Christmas story had the full freedom to make their own choices and so do we.

Today, the passage we read focused on just one thing. One of the names of baby Jesus, the name Emmanuel. You are familiar with this passage if you have gone to church for a few years. Prophet Isaiah had many prophesies relating to the Messiah to come and one of his incredible prophecies, which Apostle Matt quotes is that a virgin shall give birth to a son and he will be called Emmanuel. This now would not be his only name. His most well known name is Jesus of course but Emmanuel has a very significant meaning and that is what we are going to focus on today. Now the passage itself tells us that Emmanuel means “God is with us”. These four words are so comforting just by itself. God is with us. But, if I were to ask you, what does it really mean that God is with us, what would you say? See to really understand this phrase we have to understand better who “God” is and who the “us” is. So let me help you dive a little deeper.

I want to ask you this. When you look back have you ever wondered about God? Have you wondered if God really exists. If he does, what is he really like? Throughout the ages people have wondered the same thing. Is God really real? If God is real then where is God? Is God everywhere, or somewhere far away? Some people have said that he is like a watchmaker who makes a watch, winds it up and then gives it away and has nothing to do with it afterwards. The watch maker God is the creator of everything but he does not interfere with how the universe is running. He just lets things take their course and maybe he is watching what is going on, maybe he is not. Some people might feel, God is like that. Other people say, no no God is not like that. They say that God is like this big intelligent being and the whole universe itself is part of his body. Even you and me. We are really not separate beings but part of the being of God like a drop is a part of an ocean. Even good and evil according to them are mere forces of creation and destruction that are equally necessary functions within the larger body of God. Just like in our own body, every moment cells are being created and cells are being destroyed and the force that brings about the destruction of the cells is as important as the force that creates new ones. Some other people say no no, good and evil are not part of God but that God is good and there is an evil force out there in opposition to God. And the course of history is a battle between the forces between good and evil.

There may be literally hundreds more ideas about what God is like and how God relates to good and evil. In fact you and I can ponder this question for ever and come up with our own theories. The Bible says, using the human imagination to understand what God is like is as stupid as the idea of building a physical tower in the city of Babel to reach God. While the idea itself is foolish, if you live your life based on a foolish idea, you will actually get yourself killed and I am not talking about just physical death.

On the other hand, the Bible says, if we are genuine seekers who really hunger to know what God is like, the real God will reveal Himself to us. In fact God is looking for those kind of seekers. Ps 14: 2 says, “The Lord looks down from heaven on all mankind to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God”. And what does God do for those who sincerely seek him? Deut 4:29 promises seekers this. “But if from there you seek the Lord your God, you will find him if you seek him with all your heart and with all your soul”.   
  
Now assuming you are seeking God with all your heart and all your soul, this is what the Bible says about God. The Bible says that God should never be confused with the universe. Why? Because the universe and everything in it including you and me were made by God. God is the Creator and we are His created beings. The Bible also says that God created us because he loves us. Jer 31:3 says, “I have loved you with an everlasting love”. And in return for His love, He wants us to love him back as Deut 6:5 says , “That you love the Lord, with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength”. Now love is meaningless if it is does not come from inside of us, right? We cannot be forced to love like a robot. So if we are given a choice to love God it also means we have a choice to not love God. Now the choice to not love God and do our own thing is the essence of evil. And the most powerful being who chooses to not love God but do what is pleasing to himself is Satan. Satan’s one mission in life is to draw people away from God and towards himself. So you might ask the question, is God in battle with Satan? This is a very important question to understand. And I want to make sure you understand what I am saying right. God and Jesus are not in battle with Satan. Yes, you heard me right, God and Jesus are not in battle with Satan. Now you might say, how can you say that? There is no verse in the Bible that says, God is in battle with Satan. What the Bible says is this. When Jesus died on the cross, as a sacrifice for all humankind after living a sinless life, Satan was defeated. The end of story. God did not battle Satan, he defeats him in one step.

So what about the battle between good and evil then? Well, there is a battle going on between good and evil. And it is not between God and Satan, the battle between good and evil is taking place in us and around us. What does all this have to do with Emmanuel. Have patience, you will see. You see, all human beings have an awareness of what is right and wrong in their lives. And every human being has forces that are pushing us towards good and there are forces pushing us towards evil. A famous Soviet Christian writer Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, describes it like this. He says, “The line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either, but right through every human heart.” That means the real battle between good and evil is taking place inside our hearts. And when that battle happens you know which side is winning according to the Bible. Well, it is the evil side. You see according to the Bible, we as human beings always chose to make evil choices. Gen 6:5 puts it like this, “The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. Gen 8:21 also is very clear, it says, “for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth”. This is God’s description of human kind in our fallen state.

But take heart, this is not the end of the story. Because remember Emmauel, God is with us. The first aspect of God being with us is that God is with us in the internal battle between good and evil. This is how it works. God in the form of Jesus Christ defeats Satan on the cross and pays the punishment of all our sins. So after paying the penalty for our sins he comes to each of of us and asks us permission to come into our lives and clean us up and help us in our internal battles in our heart. Isin’t that amazing! And when you do give him permission to live inside you, something fascinating happens. Christ comes in, takes over the battle with the evil forces that were previously controlling us. And everytime we let Christ be in charge we win over the evil forces. We can still sin, but only when we don’t allow Christ to fully be in control. But every time Christ is in control, evil loses. It is not like before where we sin because sin has control over us. This is the first implication of Jesus being revealed as the “God who is with us”. Emmanuel means, God’s spirit can now dwelling in you and you in him. Gal 2:20 says “it is no longer I who lives, but Christ who lives in me.” Emmanuel, is the God who wants to live inside of us and give us victory over the battle in our own hearts.

There is another implication to the name of this baby born on Christmas day. Emmanuel is the one who carries our burdens along side of us. You see, it is not just our hearts that were affected by sin. The whole world we live in is affected by sin. And because of that life is full of very big struggles. There is no promise of a smooth ride through life in the Bible. In fact the only thing that you can be sure of in life is that life will be difficult. An amazing woman of God called Mary Reed who was a school teacher in the US who was called by God to be a missionary to India in 1884. She was 30 years old when she heard this call from God and went. She landed in India in a place called Chandag. Chandag was a leper colony. In those days leprosy was a poorly understood disease. If you caught leprosy your body because so deformed and ugly looking and nobody wanted to catch that and so you had to leave your family and live outside the city in a place reserved just for those with the disease. After serving for 6 years in the Chandag leper colony, Mary Reed was back in the US on a furlough when she realized that she had caught the disease herself. You see she could have been discouraged and even angry at God for not protecting her from the disease if He called her into this work. But amazingly, she was not moved from her path. In fact she went right back to the leper colony and continued serving the people there for another 46 years. What was the source of her strength to carry one. The fact that she knew God was with her. These were her own words. **He Who has called and prepared me, promises that He Himself will be to me as a little sanctuary where I am to abide, and abiding in Him, I shall have a supply of all my need.  He has enabled me to say not with a sigh, but with a song, ‘Thy will be done.’”**

Can you see God being with her through her great burdens? God was her little sanctuary, carrying her burdens. Matt 11:30 says, My yoke is easy and my burden is light. Jesus is the Emmanuel. God who is with you to carry your life burdens, so that no matter what life throws at you, you will not be overcome.

But God is Emmanuel in one more way. You see when Christ comes into our lives, the forces of evil cannot operate from inside of us anymore. So what they do instead? They leave us and try to get to us from the outside. Remember when Jesus was tempted it, it was not his inner voice that was tempting him. It was Satan who came to him in person and made these propositions to him. That is how the enemy will operate on those people for whom it cannot work on from the inside. But no matter how strong the external force is that comes against you, when God is with you, you cannot be defeated. Rom 8:31 says this, “If God be for us who can be against us?” Jesus is the Immanuel, the God who with with us to help us gain victory over every enemies.

This is what I hope you will be celebrating this Christmas, God who is with us, helping us overcome our own inner evil, God who is with us to carry lives burdens and the God who is with us to help us gain victory even over Satan’s best schemes.

When you hear the word Emmanuel this season, I hope it will bring to mind all the ways that God wants to be with you. Have a wonderfully blesses Christmas!

Let us pray.