

Sunday Sermon November 28
When God Came Down
Isaiah 7:14

Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. (Isaiah 7:14)

I cannot count the number of times I have heard the phrase, “if only God were here, if only God would come!” In a world consumed by savage hatred, economic uncertainty, corrupt government, and perhaps even a world war looming on the horizon, we are tempted to ask the question, “Is God around – is he here?” The Bible responds with words of hope and certainty. God is here and God is coming.

Indeed, “the best of all is God with us.” Those were the dying words of John Wesley. And those words are the simple message of Christmas – the first advent. This simple message is found in the Hebrew word, *Immanuel*. It was the answer to the troubling times, in Isaiah’s day as Assyria was about to come and take the 10 northern tribes captive. It was the good news in Jesus’s day as Israel struggled under the oppression of Rome. And it is the good news today as ISIS and terrorism terrifies our planet. God has come down. And this morning I am going to give you the simplest outline for a sermon that you have ever heard in your life.

I. God is with us!

The simple message of Christmas is that the Creator, King of the universe, has become a human being. Think of it! *This baby* is the one who in the beginning sent the flaming stars and suns spinning off into the limitless reaches of space. *This baby* is the one and only one who can forgive all of our sins and indeed every sin that we commit is a sin against him. Whatever that sin is that is haunting you now, he can and will forgive a repentant heart. *This baby* is the one who is the sovereign ruler and Lord of the universe which means that he owns us. *This baby* from the very beginning of his life received worship as only God can. From the lowly shepherds to the kings of the earth, eventually every knee will bow before him. *This baby* is the one who can see into the very depths of a person’s heart revealing their every motive, understanding

their every sorrow, and sharing their every joy! You and I can no more grasp the totality of *this baby* with our minds then we can take the Milky Way and capture it in a bottle. *This baby* was conceived by the Holy Spirit of God. A virgin would carry this gift from heaven.

This astounding truth would so capture the mind of his followers that they would even be willing to die for it. What is impossible for us to understand is how repulsive, repugnant, how unthinkable it would have been for a first century Jew to believe that God would take on human flesh. The last people in the world (in that day) who would have believed on Christ would have been a Jew. But they did. And they too taught that Christianity was exclusive. Indeed, Christianity is irritating because every other religion says that its founder was a teacher whose moral teachings will lead you to God. Christianity says no! God had to come down and deliver you from your sin. You were so bad off that you could never raise yourself up to the place where you could meet God.

Now if Christ is God, then there is nothing in your life that is a match for him. There is nothing in your life that he cannot overcome. Whether it is bad habits, excruciatingly difficult situations, relational problems or problems in ministry, Jesus is going to win! Stop and take a moment and give to him that thing which is ruining or terrorizing your life. God working in and through you can handle it!

II. God is *with* us!

God has entered into an intimate relationship with us. Before Jesus came to earth, God's appearance was terrifying. He appeared in a whirlwind, as a smoking furnace, a pillar of fire, and the brilliant glory of the Shekinah cloud. People at the sight or sound of him bit the dust. Now God seeks to have an intimate relationship, a friendship, a deep communion with us. The tragedy is that many of us know about, but have never really met God. We have never had a mind altering, life changing experience with God.

It reminds me of the story of a singer who idolized another world renowned singer. She would listen to all of her CDs and attend all of her concerts, but she was always chicken to go up and meet her afterwards. She knew about the singer, but she never really met her.

Martin Luther was a seminary professor who taught the book of Romans, systematic theology, and regularly attended church. He knew much about God, but he had never really met God. Indeed, he did everything he could do to earn God's respect, but one day he realized that he had been trying to earn what was a free gift. He spoke of the experience as an ushering into paradise itself – a day when he finally met and understood God and his gift of salvation.

I want you to think about what it means when it says that God is with us. It means that God knows by experience what we experience. You say that no one “knows the trouble I've seen,” but Jesus knows! You say that your body has taken such a beating, but Jesus's body took such a beating. You say that you have had a life well acquainted with misery and sorrow, but Jesus was well acquainted with sorrow. You say that you've been rejected far too often, but Jesus was rejected far too often. Somebody does know the trouble that you've seen.

Look at what he did to be with you. Look at what he sacrificed for you! What are you doing to be with him? What is keeping you from being with him? You say you don't have the time to have conversations with God; you don't have the time to read God's word; you'll have the time to meet together with the people of God; you don't have the time to reach out to the community. But Jesus took the time. Jesus left the trappings of glory to enter into a cesspool of iniquity in order to be with you - in order to have an intimate relationship with you. You should be willing to claw your way through anything that is keeping you from him.

III. God is with us!

I want us to take a moment and stop to think of the people who have been invited into the kingdom of God. Overwhelmingly they are the outcasts, the less intelligent, the less powerful, the less... You fill in the blank. But all that have a truly authentic relationship with Jesus Christ realize that when it comes to a relationship with God, “all you need is nothing!” Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling. John Stott has said that there only three types of people in the world; those who are terrified of God; those who hate God; and those who worship God. The truth is that once you come to understand all that

it means when it says "God with us" you cannot give Christ a lukewarm response. It can only be all or nothing!

Conclusion

So we see that one of our biggest problems is the way we take for granted who Jesus is. We forget the many ways he has influenced our world: 1) For example, children would be thought of differently because of Jesus. In the ancient world, children usually didn't get named until the eighth day or so. Up until then there was a chance that the infant would be killed or left to die of exposure particularly if it was deformed or of an un-preferred gender. This custom changed because a group of people (called Christians) remembered that they were followers of a man who said, "Let the little children come to me." 2) Jesus never married. But his treatment of women led to the formation of the community that was so congenial to women that they would join it in record numbers. In this community women are share absolute equality of personhood and share the same inheritance and future as men. 3) Jesus never wrote a book. Yet his call to know and love God with all one's mind would lead to a community with such a reverence for learning that when the classical world was destroyed (in what was sometimes called the Dark Ages), that little community would preserve what was left of its learning. In time, the movement he started would give rise to libraries and even guilds of learning. 4) He never held an office or led an army and yet the movement he started would eventually mean the end of Emperor worship, be cited in documents like the Magna Carta, begin a tradition of common-law and limited government, and undermine the power of the state rather than reinforce it as other religions in the Empire had done. It is because of his movement that language such as "we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights" entered history. 5) The Roman Empire in which Jesus was born could be splendid but also cruel, especially for the malformed and diseased and enslaved. Jesus said, "Whatever you do for one of the least of these, you do for me." An idea slowly emerged that the suffering of every single individual human being matters, that those who are able to help out should do so. Hospitals and relief efforts of all kinds emerged from this

movement; even today they often carry names that remind us of Christ and his teachings. 6) Humility was scorned in the ancient world and yet he became enshrined in a cross and it was eventually championed as a virtue. Enemies, who were thought to be worthy of vengeance, came to be seen as worthy of love. Forgiveness moved from weakness to an act of moral beauty. Let me remind you - The truth is that once you come to understand all that it means when it says "God with us" you cannot give Christ a lukewarm response. You can no longer take him for granted. It can only be all or nothing! What will it be with you?