

Immanuel – Matthew 1:23

Introduction: A story is told of an elderly Christian man who was walking through a park on a cold day when he noticed a bunch of sparrows gathered around a pile of birdseed someone had put out. As the man walked closer, the birds began fluttering their wings. And when he got even closer they all flew away.

The man stopped and thought – “*Why, I’m not going to hurt those birds! Why did they scatter like that? I meant them no harm!*” – Then he thought, “*But they didn’t know that.*” And that’s when he realized, it wasn’t his intentions that caused the birds to scatter...it was because he was so much bigger and different from them. The only way he could walk among them was if he was one of them. If he could somehow become a sparrow and fly down to them, and share their life.

Well, that’s exactly what God has done for us. You see, since the beginning of time, God has wanted to have a relationship with His people. And all that time, God only wanted to love us and care for us, but He was so much bigger and seemed so different from us, therefore man would not turn to Him. So, He sent Jesus to walk among us...as both God and man.

The prophet Isaiah had a word for this. Isaiah 7:14 says, “*Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child, and will give birth to a Son, and will call him Immanuel.*” Matthew tells us that Immanuel is translated...“*God with us.*” Jesus is literally God living among men. And that is good news today.

But what does it mean, “*God with us?*” How can we fully grasp the impact of Immanuel? How can we fully experience and appreciate “*God with us?*”

Today, I want to share with you three steps you can take in order to fully experience “*God with us.*” First, you have to:

1. Put Jesus in Your Plan. Matthew 11:28-30.

We’ve all got plans. Kids plan to grow up. Teenagers plan to graduate, or get a date, or get a car. Young men and women plan to get married. Adults plan to get a better job or to retire. But as with all plans, they don’t always go according to plan.

There are potential problems with every plan we make. That’s why Jesus tells us that we need to put Him in our plans. He is the problem solver. In Mt. 11:28-30, Jesus says, “*Come to me.*” “*Believe in Me*” and

“*Follow Me.*” Why? Because without Jesus in our plans, we are not going to find rest, and peace and direction in life.

Look at how uneasy people are today. I read the other day that our country is approaching 10 trillion dollars in debt. And many American families are following close behind. One estimate I read said that it would take each American family contributing \$30,000 just to pay it off. Have you got that kind of money lying around? I don't.

Just look at our security issues. I heard a travel agent talking about how secure she felt traveling around the world, but whenever she gets back home, she's constantly locking her doors, and making sure her security alarms are functioning properly.

People are worried. People are uneasy. People need to find rest. And where are they going to get it? From the government? From their bankrolls? Hardly! The only place to find real rest is from Jesus who says “*Come to me...and I will give you rest.*” Jesus is the sparrow who came down to walk among us.

And when we do come to Him, He tells us to do something strange. We are supposed to put on his yoke.

A yoke is something that is used for work. People used to take two oxen and hook them together with a yoke and then to a plow or a wagon, and the yoke would help them harness their energy. Many times a younger inexperienced ox would be yoked with a mature one so that it could learn. If it slowed down or stopped, the older ox would just keep going and pull him along.

This is what happens when we put Jesus in our plans. We hook up with Christ, and He teaches us and helps share our burden. That's Immanuel. That's “*God with us.*”

What are you yoked to now? What is pulling you through life? Your job, your family, your fears? You will only find true rest, and truly understand Immanuel when you hook up with Christ and connect with him.

Once you put Jesus in your plan...there is another concept Jesus teaches us in Matthew. You've also got to:

2. Put Your Plans in God's Hands. (Matthew 16:24)

If you are a true follower of Christ, you'll put your plan in God's hands. In verse 24 Jesus says that if anyone desires to come after me (if you want to walk beside Christ in service) There are some things you must do.

First, you must deny yourself. That means to put God at the top of your priority list. Second, you must take up your cross. That's making daily sacrifices and that's hard to do. It's easy to say nice things about Jesus, but to actually sacrifice the things we want for the things He wants is hard to do. And third, you must follow Him which means abandoning our plans and following His plan. And it's hard to follow somebody when you're not watching them, right? Now understand this...if you'll seek "*God with us,*" it won't be easy...but it will be a wonderful experience (25).

Has anyone ever heard of Larry Walters? He's one of those guys who achieved his 15 minutes of fame back in 1982. That is when he strapped himself in a lawn chair and tethered it to the ground. Then he filled up 45 weather balloons with helium and tied them to the chair. Then he cut the tether and shot straight up into the atmosphere.

Now he thought he might go about 1,000 feet up, but no...he went about 11,000 feet up. I mean there were airplanes dodging him over LAX airport in LA. But I want you to know, Larry Walters came prepared. He carried a BB gun up with him. He figured when he got ready to come down, he'd just shoot out a few balloons to lower himself. Well, after shooting a few balloons, he dropped his BB gun. Eventually he got down without any injury. One reporter asked him, "*Weren't you scared?*" and he replied, "*yes, but wonderfully so.*"

Well, that is what Jesus is saying to His disciples, "*You might have to suffer for following me, but if you do...it will be a wonderful experience.*"

So, in order to fully experience "God with you" you must put Jesus in your plans, and then put your plans in God's hands. Bt there's one more thing to do. You must:

3. Put Your Hand to God's Plan (Matthew 28:18-20)

Mt. 28:18-20 is called the great commission. And in these final words of Christ to His disciples before He ascended into heaven, He gave them and us the command to put our hands to the task. He is saying here that He will be with us when we put our hand to His plan. In other words, when you get to work for God.

If you really want to know Immanuel; then know that you have been commissioned by 100% man, 100% God in Jesus Christ. Christ does not say “*if you are a good preacher GO*” or “*if you are an evangelist GO*” or “*if you have extra time GO*” or “*if you have a degree in theology GO*” or “*if you are wealthy GO*” or “*if you are qualified, GO!*” NO! Jesus says because I have all the authority, and if you believe in me then GO and make disciple of all nations. Now, if you believe Christ, how many disciples have you made?

The Great Commission requires something of you. You have to go, but remember, God gives us a promise of Immanuel - of “*God with us.*” Jesus said in vs. 20: “*I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*” You need to put your hand to God’s plan because that is what following Christ is all about.

I remember reading about a couple who was being interviewed by a magazine about the phenomenal growth of their church. The interviewer asked the husband what his occupation was. And he replied, “*I am an ambassador for Christ.*” The interviewer said, “*But don’t you have a secular job for a living?*” The man replied, “*Of course I do, but I feel that my main job is being an ambassador for Christ. It doesn’t matter if I’m at my secular job, or at home, or at the grocery store, my occupation is to be Christ’s ambassador and tell folks about Him.*”

That man is putting his hand to God’s plan. He’s realized what 95% of Christians haven’t caught on to yet – that when Christ saves us, we belong to Him. And from that point on, everything we do should be about pointing folks to Christ and fulfilling His plan. Jesus said He came to seek and to save those who were lost. He’s left us with the task of carrying out that same mission. We have to put our hand to God’s plan and tell people about Jesus. But remember, we’re not alone. God is with us.

Conclusion: God sent Jesus to walk among us. And I hope we have learned today that Christ is with us when we choose to follow Him, when we get yoked with Him, when we sacrifice our lives for Him, and when we tell other’s about Him.

Perhaps you’ve realized today that you’ve been yoked to something besides Christ and want to take this time to really dedicate your life to following Him. If that describes you, then I invite you to come and pray. If you have never met Immanuel, let me assure you, He’s with us right now, right here. You can meet Him

personally today. We do not know what tomorrow may bring, but if Jesus is in our lives, we know whatever we face, we will not be alone. God is with us.