

"Emmanuel"

...is God with us?

by Pastor Tim Dodson
of JF Believers Church
in Menomonie, Wisc
on Christmas, Dec 25th, 2016

Isaiah 7:10-14

10 Later, the LORD sent this message to King Ahaz: 11 "Ask the LORD your God for a sign of confirmation, Ahaz. Make it

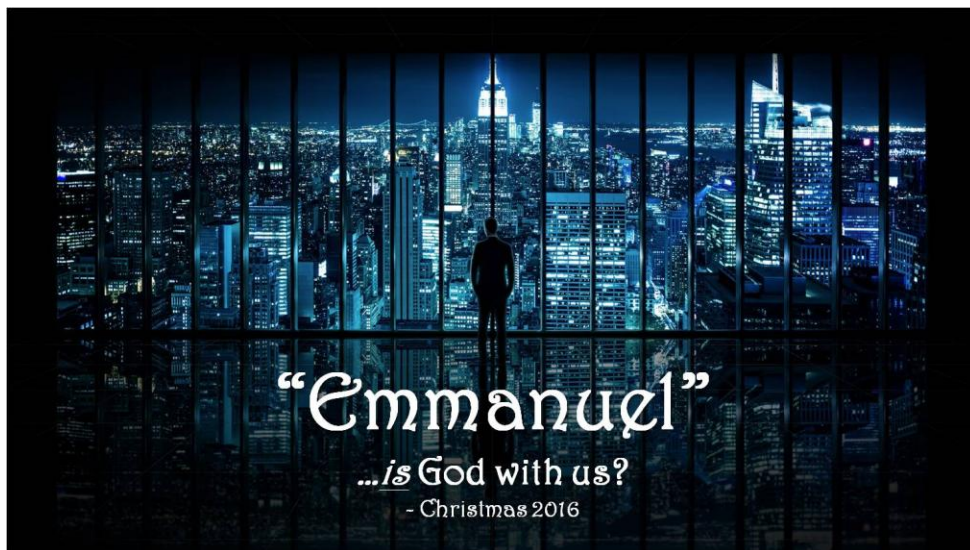
as difficult as you want — as high as heaven or as deep as the place of the dead." 12 But the king refused. "No," he said, "I will not test the LORD like that." 13 Then Isaiah said, "Listen well, you royal family of David! Isn't it enough to exhaust human patience? Must you exhaust the patience of my God as well? 14 All right then, the Lord himself will give you the sign. Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel (which means 'God is with us').

"We live in an extraordinary age. These are times of stunning changes in social organization, economic well-being, moral and ethical precepts, philosophical and religious perspectives, and human self-knowledge, as well as in our understanding of that vast universe in which we are imbedded like a grain of sand in a cosmic ocean. As long as there have been human beings, we have posed the deep and fundamental questions, which evoke wonder and stir us into at least a tentative and trembling awareness, questions on the origins of consciousness; life on our planet; the beginnings of the Earth; the formation of the Sun; the possibility of intelligent beings somewhere up there in the depths of the sky; as well as, the grandest inquiry of all - on the advent, nature and ultimate destiny of the universe. For all but the last instant of human history these issues have been the exclusive province of philosophers and poets, shamans and theologians.

The diverse and mutually contradictory answers offered demonstrate that few of the proposed solutions have been correct. But today, as a result of knowledge painfully extracted from nature, through generations of careful thinking, observing, and experimenting, we are on the verge of glimpsing at least preliminary answers to many of these questions.

...If we do not destroy ourselves, most of us will be around for the answers. Had we been born fifty years earlier, we could have wondered, pondered, speculated about these issues, but we could have done nothing about them. Had we been born fifty years later, the answers would, I think, already have been in. Our children will have been taught the answers before most of them will have had the opportunity to even formulate the questions. By far the most exciting, satisfying and exhilarating time to be alive is the time in which we pass from ignorance to knowledge on these fundamental issues; the age where we begin in wonder and end in understanding. In all of the four-billion-year history of the human family, there is only one generation privileged to live through that unique transitional moment: that generation is ours." - Carl Sagan, American astronomer, cosmologist, author and astrophysicist.

For many people around the world this morning, life is in upheaval. There are those that would justifiably argue that the world has always been an inhospitable place, and that 'man's inhumanity to man' has always been a stark present reality. *Perhaps.* Yet anyone who has dared to reach beyond their immediate bubble of living would be compelled to acknowledge that despite man's best attempts at a "mind-over-matter" lifestyle, it has become increasingly hard to ignore the chaos. Our TV's bring home the horrors of war, terrorism and extremism; Sights and sounds of anguish, loss, and fear. Phrases are being forced into our common vernacular, like "suicide bomber," "Islamic radicalization," "LGBTQ," and "political refugee." We have presidents of nations we consider our friends, literally flipping off America on national TV...while verbally stating the same, and bragging about personally murdering people in cold blood that are suspected drug dealers...never mind human rights or law and order. "There are today so many "wars and rumors of wars" (Mark 13:7), and there are increasingly "great earthquakes," around the world and famines and pestilences. (Luke 21:11)



Politically we have seemingly never been so divided as a nation and even as a world. Not only nationalism's but *internal* strife's and divisions so marked that we have increasingly turned physically violent upon each other...each wanting freedom of speech but at the same time wanting to deny the other guy the same right. Each side labeling the opposition as hateful, bigoted and frankly insane, and the *other* candidate as the devil who, if left to their own, will destroy us all. To protest perceived violence toward us personally, we shoot some other people with guns and burn buildings to the ground. It's all madness.

Certainly, no one can deny that society and culture have been turned upside down and inside out. Truth is more than "situational," for now it is perceived to simply reflect our personal opinions, views, desires, and cultural stances. We *create* truth to fit our perceptions, instead of gathering our perceptions from the facts of the truth. Thus truth is ironically now nebulous and fluid to say the least.

Today we argue over just what a 'man' is, and thus what bathroom he (or *she*) should use. I can drive to Colorado and legally get high, (in other ways than climbing up the Rockies!) but cross 12 inches back over the invisible line into Nebraska and be promptly arrested for trying the same behavior. Our American public educational levels continue to fall compared to the rest of the world, while we faithfully pump millions into high school sports programs. I can legally kill my unborn baby as merely a "fetal mass", but if YOU do anything even inadvertently to cause the death of *my* unborn fetus, you will be charged with murder or at least manslaughter.

We claim that we want to get rid of prejudice and racism, but yet we have a "Black Student Union" at Stout. Can you imagine if someone tried to have a "*White* Student Union?" There would be protests in the street with violent cries of racism! Why can't we just have a "*Stout* Student Union" where everyone is welcome and equal? "Common sense?" It seems that such died out a long time ago, now conveniently replaced with political correctness or *incorrectness*, social protocols, fictional yet personal philosophies, and a wholly 'me-first' attitude...if not a 'me-only' attitude!

Certainly we are hard-pressed to not step back and wonder where God is in all of this. Has He reneged on His promise to "be with us?" Has He changed His mind on the whole "*I will never leave you or forsake you?*" (Deut 31:6) What should our response be to all of this? How then should we live?

Well, we could further 'gather up the troops' and throw down and 'take back our country' for Jesus. Well, firstly, what would make anyone think this nation *ever* was Christian? Because we hung a sign out front? Because of tradition and protocol? You mean our nation of historical racism and prejudice, slavery, vast pollution, theft of Indian lands, prevalence of drug addiction, marital and child abuse, liberalism, street crime, and sanctioned white collar elitism? *That* 'christian nation?'

And secondly, to take that approach is frankly wholly unbiblical. Where did Jesus *ever* promote political activism? Where did He ever tell us to 'save the world' over "*save the people and get off the sinking ship?*" Does that make you bristle? Take it up with the Master and the Book He left us, because it's a fact and again...*inventing our own 'want-it-to-be' truth*, does not change a thing! Perhaps we would do better to pay attention to our spiritual 'flight itinerary' so we don't miss the plane. Because this world is not our home...just ambassadors serving our King and our real Country, and I don't mean America!

Scripture has much to say about the "last days" and the departure of us, *the church*. Daniel 12:4 tells us about "...*the time of the end, when many will rush here and there, and knowledge will increase.*" Such statements cannot be ignored in a time where U.S. and foreign airlines flew more than 895 million passengers through U.S. airports in **2015**, a record high. That does not take into consideration the world at large where the numbers say 1 in 2 people on earth flew on a plane last year. Consider cars, trains, and other modes of transportation, and you have a people that are on the move... "*rushing here and there*" as never before in the history of mankind.

We know also that we are living in what is referred to as the "The Information Age" which makes this passage seem even more obvious. Even the most skeptical mind must admit that knowledge is exploding in all directions. It is said that 80% percent of the world's total knowledge has been brought forth in the last decade and that 90% percent of all the scientists who have ever lived are alive today. Technology is exploding, and it changes almost daily. When I was in high school, a computer filled a large room of wheels and tape. Today my cell phone has more computing power.

Ok, ok, so mankind is "winding down" to the end...no one who has a pulse will argue that fact today. And I can live with that, if not totally *get all up with that*, as long as I know He is still truly in the game with us too. *I'm* still in, as long as *HE* is.

Ps 37:28 For the LORD loves justice, and he will never abandon the godly.
He will keep them safe forever but the children of the wicked will die.

Isa 41:10 Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be discouraged, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand.

1Sa 12:22 The LORD will not abandon his people, because that would dishonor his great name.
For it has pleased the LORD to make you his very own people.

How easy it is to lose our way in all this hub-bub, and find ourselves in a very quiet place, wondering if Christ is still walking with us. Truth be told, that fact is never in doubt, but it *is* righteous to ask "*am I still walking with Him?*" God is *still* "with us" but do we know it? The question should be asked, *Are we still with Him?* Have I ceased to see Him around me? Do I still find Him in the "thin places" and see Him in His works, His people, and in His miraculous?

Recently, the Apollo astronaut John Glenn died, and upon his departure someone released this quote from him. Spoken from the Discovery in orbit over the earth, he said "*To look out at this kind of creation out here and not believe in God is to me impossible.*" How is it that some people see God everywhere, and some folks never seem to see Him anywhere?

When I was young, I found out early that I am not one to take mushroom hunting. My family was really into Morel mushrooms, but I swear I couldn't find one of those mushrooms if my life depended on it! Why is that? For some reason, I never had the eye for it. But I did get my daddy's eagle eye for other things. I remember on one occasion when I was a kid, the whole family was driving down a four lane road, and suddenly my dad slowed down quickly, looked into the rear view mirror, and then stopped completely and puts the car in reverse. He slowly crept backwards for yards, and then stopped, opened his door and reached down and picked up a little pocket knife lying on the road. He did that kind of thing many times when I was a kid. Now, I have *those* eyes, but I *can't* find those mushrooms! Why would he even *see* a little pocket knife laying in the middle of the road as he sped by? Because he was *looking*...he was *watching*. Are *you* watching for God? And the only way we develop those kind of eyes, is by taking our eyes off of something else. God's eyes are forever *on* us, and *for* us, telling us in 2 Chronicles 16:9 that "*...the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him.*" **But where are our eyes?**

"Modern life assaults us with an infinite range of things we could do, we would love to do, or some people tell us we should do. But we are not God and we are neither infinite nor eternal. We are quite simply finite. We have only so many years, so much energy, so many gray cells, and so many bank notes in our wallets. 'Life is too short to...' eventually shortens to 'life is too short.'" - Os Guinness, The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life

Are we even *looking* for the miraculous anymore? Because the devils work is to simply get us just distracted enough by the grand illusion of the world, that we get separated from Dad and things get *real* quiet, *real* quick. Suddenly we're running through life looking for a "hard line" to the mother-ship to pull us out like in "The Matrix." It all *looks* like reality, but is it all just a dream? Few of us are willing to make the sacrifice to gain the experience of seeing Him or to

gain that ability. We want to just *add* Christ to our already packed lives, and that dynamic makes for a distant and shallow relationship with Christ, if there exists one at all. A “mile wide and an each deep” as the old saying goes.

So if Christ says He is here with us, how does He want to find us living? Well, He specifically answered that in Matthew 28: 19-20. Right before He tells us that we can “...*be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age,*” He says this: “*Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. (And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.)*”

Therefore *go*.

Therein lays intrinsically the heart of our call. There is no “stay” for any of us. That doesn’t mean I must always be in motion. For our constant movement is often the culprit for the contrary life! But rather I need to move out of my comfort realm...out of my places of safety. I need to go where Jesus is operating. I need to join Him on His quest and embrace the call He lived out as our own. I need to *go*.

So in a world atmosphere that naturally drives us to withdraw...that makes us want to retreat and hunker down in safety...to isolate ourselves in uncertainty of world events and future direction, Jesus is still calling upon us to “go”. Go and make disciples. Go and baptize. Go and teach. Go....*get out there. Engage.*

Amos 8:11- 12 "*Behold, the days are coming,*" says the Lord GOD, "*That I will send a famine on the land, Not a famine of bread, Nor a thirst for water, But of hearing the words of the LORD. They shall wander from sea to sea, And from north to east; They shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the LORD, But shall not find it.*"

In London, in a place called Bunhill Fields, there is a very interesting cemetery. It’s a place where many famous people are buried - Charles Wesley is buried there, Isaac Watts the great hymn writer, Daniel Defoe the author of Robinson Crusoe. Opposite that graveyard is the chapel of John Wesley and a statue erected to him. Also across that road is John Wesley’s house, where on March 2nd 1791 Wesley opened his eyes and exclaimed for the very last time, upon his deathbed, these words: ‘The best of all is this: God is with us’.

He could have said a lot of things at that moment, but he said that the best of all is this: ***God is with us.***

Way back in Genesis, when God created Adam and Eve, He was with them in the Garden of Eden. He walked with them and communed with them, until one day Adam and Eve hid from Him. Never did God hide from man. It has always been man who has been trying to from God, because man is guilty. We have disobeyed and sinned against God. It was God who was calling out to Adam and Eve, “Where are you?” (Gen 3:9)

The world from the beginning has always been about the desire of God to be with man. Moses told his people, “*If ...you seek the LORD your God, you will find him if you look for Him with all your heart and with all your soul.*” (Deut 4:29)

Paul spoke these words in Acts 17, verses 24-27, saying: “*He is the God who made the world and everything in it. Since he is Lord of heaven and earth, he doesn’t live in man-made temples, and human hands can’t serve his needs — for he has no needs. He himself gives life and breath to everything, and he satisfies every need. From one man he created all the nations throughout the whole earth. He decided beforehand when they should rise and fall, and he determined their boundaries. “His purpose was for the nations to seek after God and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him — though he is not far from any one of us.*”

Yes...it’s a crazy world out there today. But rest assured, God ***is*** with us. Never doubt that believer.

“*The waters are rising, but so am I. I am not going under, but over.*” —Catherine Booth, co-founder of the Salvation Army