

Emmanuel

John 1:1-13

December 16, 2018

Emmanuel. What an incredible reality! God. With US. This was foreshadowed some 700 years earlier by the prophet Isaiah.¹ Back when Isaiah wrote this word, Emmanuel,” the name ‘God is with us’ was meant to convince King Ahaz² that God could rescue him from his enemies. Sadly, the king did not believe this clear message from God. He went on to put his trust in the Assyrian nation, instead of the LORD. On the 1st Christmas, Jesus came to earth as Emmanuel, “the final fulfillment of this prophecy from Isaiah, for he was ‘God with us’ in the fullest sense.”³ Jesus came to rescue us from darkness, if we will just believe His clear message. That’s why our Christmas cantata this year was titled, “By Heaven’s Light.”

When I think about light and darkness, it reminds me of a time when our family was vacationing in Texas. While we were there, we had an opportunity to go on a cave tour. At one point, our tour guide led us down a very long, DEEP stairway. We seemed to just keep walking and walking. I was really proud of my wife, Debbie, because she’s a bit claustrophobic. But she stuck with us all the way down to the very bottom of this cave, far below the surface of the earth. That’s when our tour guide threw us a curveball. The entire way down, the stairway had been well light. But now, he told us that part of the tour included turning ALL of the lights out. He made everyone put away their cell phones and turn off any flashlights. Then, he told us he was going to turn off the lights for a full 60 seconds. And there we were, standing in absolute, pitch black; the absence of all light. It was actually peaceful in a way, but it was only easy to endure because we all knew that light was close at hand. If that tour guide had let this go on for another 5-10 minutes of darkness or for a few hours, it probably would have gotten pretty ugly down there! Fortunately, he turned the lights back on after the 60 seconds, like he’d promised.

This illustration is a little misleading though. Because, in John’s Gospel, he isn’t talking about a physical darkness; he is talking about spiritual darkness. There is nothing peaceful or comforting about spiritual darkness, even if, it only lasts 60 seconds.⁴ And, this spiritual darkness isn’t just about the absence of light, but rather active resistance to the light. This is why John 1:5 mentions that “the darkness has not OVERCOME it.” It’s an active resistance that fights against the light, trying to overcome it. However, this darkness has NOT overcome the light, nor can it even understand the light. Before we go any further, let’s read John’s Gospel.

John begins his Gospel by talking about “the Word.” You’ll notice that “Word” is capitalized. That’s because “the Word” is referring to THE WORD, as in Jesus Christ, the Living Word of God.⁵ John 1:1-13 tells us that, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He (Jesus) was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God — children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.”

¹ See Matthew 1:23 and Isaiah 7:14.

² See 2 Kings 16:7-9 and 2 Chronicles 28:16-21. *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI 2011, p. 2365.

³ *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI 2011, p. 1126.

⁴ Spiritual darkness can give you a pretty creepy feeling. The presence of evil gives us goosebumps, but not the good kind of goosebumps. The hair raised on end, unsettling kind of uncomfortable goose bumps when your blood pressure rises, you start breathing faster, and you feel an urge to run away.

⁵ Chuck Swindoll says it this way, “Words communicate, and that’s precisely what Jesus did...Jesus was not simply the revealer of God but God Himself revealed.” *Exalting Christ...the Son of God: A Study of John 1-5*, Insight for Living, Fullerton, CA, 1987, p. 10. Note also John 1:18.

There is a lot of important truth to digest here in these 13 verses. But I want us to focus in, on one verse in particular. John 1:5 says, “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”⁶ Jesus is the light. He was the light that shone 2,000 years ago at the very 1st Christmas, but He is also the light that still shines today. Jesus shines in the darkness; and, the darkness, has not overcome Him. The darkness has never been able to overcome Jesus and it never will. That’s because Jesus’ very nature is to be what verse 4 calls “the light of all mankind.” There are 2 VERY important outcomes, related to Jesus as the light who shines in the darkness.

1) The 1st outcome, is the light that Jesus shines into the darkness,

of each of our own personal lives. His light illuminates our hearts and minds, our pain and our sorrow, and our lost and sinful condition. Each of us needs to make the choice as to how we will respond. Some of us will respond more in line with John 1:10-11. This entire world was made through Jesus, which means that each and every person here exists only because of Jesus. Even so, some of us have still not recognized Him. I don’t mean “recognize” Him as in, “oh wow, I didn’t know Jesus looked like that.” But rather, “recognize” Him as in acknowledging that “Jesus is God, that everything was made through Him, that His light is the true spiritual light of this world!” Some have not yet received Him for who He is. We have not acknowledged His claims, trusted Him completely, nor given Him our allegiance.⁷

Others of us, have responded more in line with John 1:12, “Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” What an amazing verse! Christ offers His light to anyone who will receive Him. Jesus is kind of like an electric company that offers service to your home.⁸ The lights won’t come on, until you agree to let them hook up service to your home. Once you receive their service, the lights turn on. Therefore, if you are reading this today seeking spiritual illumination, it begins by receiving Christ.

In other words, some of us have taken Jesus at His word.⁹ To “take Jesus at His word” is to believe that He is the Word, who was in the beginning with God and who is Himself, God. To believe that, at Christmas, He entered this world as “God with us.”¹⁰ Later on in John’s Gospel, he says this about the light of Christ, “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.”¹¹

YOU SEE, GOD LOVES EACH OF US VERY MUCH. If you are still in spiritual darkness, you could choose to come out of the darkness and to receive Jesus’ light in your life today. **Feel free to contact one of the pastors at church. We’d love to talk and pray with you.**

The 1st outcome, is the light that Jesus shines into the darkness, of each of our own personal lives. Once that light shines into our lives, we are part of the 2nd outcome.

⁶ The Greek verb can be translated as either “overcome” or “understood.” Here it probably means both. *Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2146.

⁷ Carson, D. A. (1991). *The Gospel according to John* (pp. 125–126). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans.

⁸ *Exalting Christ...the Son of God: A Study of John 1-5*, Insight for Living, Fullerton, CA, 1987, p. 12.

⁹ This is actually a bit of a play on words, since Jesus is “the Word.”

¹⁰ Those of us who have received Jesus, who have believed in His Name, have now joined God’s family. We have become His children; we have come into His light.

¹¹ John 3:17–21.

2) The 2nd outcome, is the light that Jesus calls us to shine, as children of light. Ephesians 5:8-10 describes it this way, "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord."¹² So the light of Christ not only shines INTO our own personal lives, but it also shines OUT THROUGH our lives and into the world. This means, of course, shining the light of Christ into the dark corners of our world. This means lovingly but boldly addressing the darkness: things like injustice, impurity, and greed. As we "find out what pleases the Lord," we give our lives to those priorities and those causes. Therefore, we help those who are hurting and marginalized. We help to find solutions to the problems in our community and we oppose the moral evils that are tearing people's lives apart. We bring hope where things seem hopeless.

Now, here is where a key aspect of light becomes important. If you were to turn off every single light in the room you are in and close the blinds and turn off all of your electronic devices, it would get pretty dark. (Sort of like that cave tour I mentioned earlier.) The darkness in your room could only be overcome one way. It wouldn't do you any good to yell and scream and rage against the darkness. You could complain and even curse the darkness all day long, but that wouldn't make it any lighter.

I mentioned earlier that spiritual darkness is more than the absence of light, and yet spiritual darkness thrives in the absence of light. The only way to overcome the darkness in our world, is the way that Jesus has overcome it: by shining our light into that darkness. And that is the calling of every Christ-follower.¹³ Our calling is not to sit comfortably in the light of Christ and just soak it in (although it is certainly a blessing to live in the light of Christ). The calling is to go forth, into the darkness, and shine the light.¹⁴

There's a story about a little boy was afraid of the dark. One night his mother asked him to go out on the back porch & bring her the broom. The little boy turned to his mother & said, "Mama, I don't want to go out there. It's dark." His mother smiled reassuringly at him. "Son, you don't have to be afraid of the dark," she explained. "Jesus is out there. He'll look after you & protect you." The little boy looked at his mother really hard & asked, "Are you suuuuuure Jesus is out there?" ...She said, "Yes, I'm sure. He is everywhere & he is always ready to help you when you need him." The little boy thought about that for a long minute & then went to the back door & cracked it open just a little. Peering out into the darkness, he called out, "Jesus? If you're out there, would you please hand me the broom?"

You see, we sometimes have a tendency to be afraid of the darkness. It's as if we think that somehow the spiritual darkness in our world is greater; that it is more powerful than the light of Christ. This makes me think of something else that John wrote. It's in his letter, 1 John 4:4 says, "You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world." Perhaps this tendency to sometimes fear the darkness stems from the mistake of thinking of things in a sort of "yin and yang" kind of way. In other words, we may be falling for the lie, that we are destined, as people, to be forever locked in this epic battle between good and evil. As though good/evil were equally powerful. We find this idea in some of our most epic stories. Whether that be the Star Wars series or the classic, "A Tale of Two Cities," "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch¹⁵ of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity¹⁶, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness..."¹⁷

¹² See also John 12:36

¹³ Later on, in John 16:33, Jesus says, "...In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." Because Jesus has overcome the world, we in turn can overcome the darkness that we encounter.

¹⁴ After Jesus' completed His earthly ministry of preaching. After His death, burial, and resurrection, this preaching of repentance and forgiveness continued on through Jesus' followers. There's an historical account in the New Testament book of Acts, where Jesus appears to the Apostle Paul. Actually, he was going by the name Saul, at the time. In Acts 26:17-18 Jesus tells Paul, "...I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins..."

¹⁵ "EH pock" or "EE pock"

¹⁶ "In cre DUEL ity"

¹⁷ Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*, Garden City, NY, Nelson Doubleday, p. 9.

But Christianity is not trapped in some kind of eternal dualism. What John is teaching us in his Gospel is that the darkness of this world CANNOT overcome the light of Christ. The light has come! Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us. HE is the light of the world! Christmas is our reminder that He came to overcome our darkness. Therefore, let us run to His light and receive His salvation. And once we've received His salvation, let us remember Jesus' words from the Gospel of Matthew 5:14-16, "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." Amen.

And, Merry Christmas!

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