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[Please open your Bibles the book of *Matthew*, the first book] of the *New Testament, chapter 1*. If you don't have a Bible, there's one in the pew rack in front of you. You're welcome to take that as a gift from us. If the print's too small look at the screens, we have it really, really big there.

You know this is Christmastime obviously. And I think during Christmastime most Americans are pretty confused about the identity of Jesus:

- He's the cute baby on the Christmas cards that we get.
- He's on the cartoons that the kids watch.
- He's on the Christmas specials.
- He's given pretty much a cursory bow every now and then.

But I don't think people really understand the identity of who Jesus is.

When we look at these scriptures here in a moment, you're going to see that He's given two different names.

Like most of us we all—well, all of us hopefully—have a name. It's interesting to look at the meaning behind names. My wife's name is Kristi, which means—it's a derivative of—Christ, the Anointed One. So I've lived for 28 years with the Anointed One at the house. And my name means—Salvatore means—salvation. You put us together we're a match made in Heaven: Anointed-Christ-Salvation. We had to go into the ministry. We had no other choice. That was it. You look at other names throughout— Oh, I looked up Bryan Rose [*Lead Pastor of Serve, Second Campus, Fry Road*]. It means he who is large and loud, by the way.

All through the Bible God reveals Himself through His names. A lot of times when God did something for His people—a miracle happened [or] God moved on their behalf—they gave God a name. A lot of times you look in the Bible there will be names like:

- Jehovah-Rophe: the God who heals us
- Jehovah-Nissi: the God who leads us into victory
- Jehovah-Shalom: the God of peace
- Jehovah-Jireh: the God who provides

And you begin to learn something about the nature and the character of God all through the *Old Testament* as He reveals Himself through His names.

Well, in *Matthew, chapter 1*, we are going to learn something about Jesus through the names that He is given. *Verse 21* through *verse 23*: Joseph is being talked to by an angel in a dream. He is thinking about putting Mary aside, but rather than he listens to the angel. He said: This child is from the Holy Spirit. And so Joseph, after that dream, gets up and takes Mary to be his wife. *Verse 21*:

²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" – which means, "God with us."

Matthew 1:21-23 (NIV)

There are two names given to Jesus in this passage right here. One was given to Him by His Father; and that is, the name Jesus.

HE WAS NAMED JESUS

Jesus: because He will save His people from [their] sins. That was the purpose behind Jesus.

Just like there's an identity—a reason—behind your name, the reason your parents named you that. An event or a person in their life or they thought and chose the highest hopes and gave you that name.

The same for Jesus is that He died and He was born in order that He might die and pay for the sins of the world. Oftentimes that is lost in the Christmas rush. That this little baby in a manger had a deep purpose; and that was, to be the sacrifice for the entire sin of all humanity. In fact, His name translated literally means: Jehovah is Salvation.

So God gives us His son and that little Baby in the manger literally is the salvation of the entire world. In fact, Jesus said of Himself: I have not come to be served, but I've come to serve and to give my life as a ransom for many. [*Matthew 20:28, Mark 10:45* (paraphrased)] And so Jesus—being born—was born for one specific purpose and that purpose was to die and pay for the sins of the world.

The apostles pick up on it in *Acts, chapter 4*. As they are preaching Jesus has already died. He has been resurrected, He's ascended into Heaven now, and the people gathered there. They begin to preach and say:

Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

Acts 4:12 (NIV)

So if you're here this morning and you've been looking for the truth and you're wanting to know: What does Jesus have to offer? He offers you what nobody else can offer you; and that is, He can save you from your sin. There is no other religious figure [and] there is no other deity that is out there that can make that claim. The apostles said: There is no other name given among men under Heaven by which we must be saved except that of Jesus.

So my question this morning is: When are you going to be saved? If that's why Jesus came to this earth and that's why He died—was to wash away your sin and give you a life worth living—when are you going to be saved? How about today? How about right now giving your life to Christ? The reason Jesus came is bound up in His name: He came to save us from our sins.

The second name He's given is Immanuel.

HE IS CALLED IMMANUEL

He's called Immanuel because literally God is with us.

This name was prophesized about 730 years before Jesus came. Before Jesus came Isaiah goes to a wicked king by the name of Ahaz. He said: God is going to give you a sign that your kingdom is coming to an end and this is the sign: A virgin shall bear a son and he shall be called Immanuel—God is with us. [*Isaiah 7:14* (paraphrased)] Seven hundred thirty years later Jesus Christ is born and the angel says: His name is Immanuel because God is now among men.

So 730 years before that God knew what He was going to do. Way before He even created this earth, He knew what He was going to do. All throughout history here's what you hear: Jesus is coming. Jesus is coming. Jesus is coming. Jesus is coming. And all of a sudden when Jesus was born God is here—Immanuel is with us.

So how is God with us?

GOD IS WITH US...

WHEN WE'RE HAPPY AND WHEN WE'RE HURTING

Christmas should be a happy time, shouldn't it? (I mean) after all you're going to get something—hopefully—something nice that you've been wanting. (You know) at least (you know) people will be bringing you gifts. Maybe your parents will get you something nice or maybe somebody that you love and somebody that cares for you is going to give you a real nice gift. You would think: Man, it's going to make me happy when I get that thing. And so we normally associate real happy, elated feelings during Christmas.

But unfortunately Christmas can also be a very sorrowful time.

Usually it's a time for family, isn't it? There are some families that are just broken up. There are some families that just don't get along right now. There are some families that have gone through a horrible divorce and children are separated from one another.

Maybe there's some hurt inside of your heart or maybe you've lost somebody.

This will be the first Christmas that I'm without a mother. Now she's in Heaven. She's with Jesus. But yet (you know) this Christmas, it's going to be a little different. In fact, what I've noticed is: the longer that I live I start to outlive people that I love and the people that I love aren't with me any longer. But one day when I die and I go to Heaven we're all going to be there. But right now it could be a little difficult.

Maybe it's difficult on you. Maybe it's difficult on you because:

- Your spouse died this year (or)
- You had a parent that died (or)
- ...a sibling that died (or)
- ...a good friend that died

But what you need to know is: God's with you in that.

When His good friend Lazarus died and Mary and Martha, his sisters, came and said: Lord, Lord, if you'd have been here, if you would have been here... [*John 11:21, 32* (paraphrased)] Jesus was there and He wept because they wept. [*John 11:33-35* (summarized)]

God is with us in our happy times.
God is with us in our sorrowful times.

GOD IS WITH US... IN OUR ACTIONS AND OUR REACTIONS

Now we're going to get to meddling: our actions and our reactions.

Unfortunately, I had to get out in traffic yesterday and do a little bit of Christmas shopping. I just can't believe the way people drive—I just can't. And what I really can't believe is what comes out of my mouth when they're driving like that. I mean, who gave these people permission to drive the speed limit? Nobody else is, but they are. And I'll tell you what, I correct them too. I let them know how wrong they are in their ways. So if that happened to be you yesterday, I just want to say: that was my evil twin, Saul, that you encountered and it wasn't me.

But here it is: (I mean) I'm a preacher for Heaven's sake. People come by and they do the weirdest things. I get so mad and I give them what-for when I'm behind that wheel. Then it dawns with me: What if they're a member of my church? But really what ought to dawn on me is: Immanuel—God is with me. But I don't think He participated in the things that I said and the hand-waving that I did at those people. I don't think He was in that. But every action that I do [and] every reaction to what happens to me, God is right there for every good thing that I do and every bad thing that I do.

Not only is He with me in my actions and my reactions, but He's with me when I'm in public and He's with me when I'm in private.

GOD IS WITH US... IN OUR PUBLIC AND PRIVATE TIME

He's with me when I'm on top of the world or at the bottom. He's with me in public when I've got to be good and He's with me in private when I don't got [sic] to be good.

- He's with me when I'm being tempted.
- He's with me when I'm in sorrow.
- He's with me when the pressure is on.
- He's with me when there's no pressure.

He's with me when I'm on my knees praying and I'm opening up my Bible and reading, and He's with me when I'm in public. He is with me always.

I love what *Isaiah* says—God is speaking—in *chapter 43, verse 2*:

² When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. ...⁵ I am with you...

Isaiah 43:2, 5 (NIV)

God is with us and that's the incredible meaning behind Christmas. God is now with us. It's not God of the *Old Testament* that seemed to be a pillar of fire or a cloud by day. It's not God that is on top of a mountain and it is lightning, and dark clouds and thunder and rocks are breaking in place, and his voice sounds like a trumpet. No, it's a little baby in a manger.

So if we're to live Immanuel this Christmas—the rest of the year—if we're going to live like Jesus saved us from our sins (which He has) and Immanuel-God now is with us everywhere at all times in every place, what does it mean to live like God is with us? To live Immanuel, you just have to imitate Jesus.

TO LIVE IMMANUEL YOU MUST IMITATE JESUS

You have to imitate Jesus. So how did Jesus show us that God is with us? How did He live his life in such a way that you and I can imitate His life? Because God has saved us from our sin and God now is with us inside of our lives, how would we live? Number one, we would really be humble, really be humble.

LIVE IMMANUEL...IMITATE JESUS: BE HUMBLE

Look at what the Apostle Paul says in *Philippians*:

⁵ Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: ⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷ but he made himself nothing,
Philippians 2:5-7a (NIV)

When is the last time it was somebody's goal to make themselves nothing? Most of us are going:

- I want to be somebody.
- I want to do something.
- I want to make my mark.

Jesus went out of his way to make Himself nothing—not to use being God and lording it over everybody, and using it as a position of authority that He could look down on people. He became a man.

⁷ but he made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, {—He, whom the entire creation sings out to and serves and the very stars do His will and the sun and the moon and the planets do exactly what God wants them to do; now He is serving His creation—} being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!

Philippians 2:7-8 (NIV)

Golly! Can you believe that? Have you ever set out any day and said:

- God, today I want to be nothing so You can be everything.
- I am not going to lord my position over anybody.
- I'm not trying to make a mark for myself.
- I want to go out of my way and serve people.
- I want to make the people that I'm around something, but I choose to be nothing.

And when we choose to be nothing and we empty ourselves, then the only thing that can fill us is Almighty God through His Spirit inside of us. [He] fills us with his Holy Spirit and we begin living Immanuel, because we're humble enough to know: I am nothing. He is everything. And when I choose to be nothing, then I am something in the kingdom of God. You ought to get the tape on that because that was a pretty good power-talk right there.

He takes the nature of a servant who is made in human likeness. Now this, when you think about it, will blow your mind. God, who has never been hindered or encumbered by anything, the Bible says: "No one has seen God at any time." [1 John 4:12a (NKJV)] For "God is Spirit..." [John 4:24a (NKJV)] The only God we're going to see when we get to Heaven is the exalted, glorified, Lord Jesus Christ. God never had any limitations of a body. He made bodies and He breathed in the breath of life when he made Adam and Eve. He created human beings, but He Himself was not a man.

- He never had a need
- He never went hungry
- He was never thirsty
- He never knew what it was like to sweat
- He was God: everything served Him; He served nothing

But then He becomes a human being. Now think about that. All of eternity—long before we even knew what time was—God, was this independent, free moral-agent, spirit, everywhere at all times. Now He finds Himself inside the womb of a virgin, going through the process of being formed, like He has formed so many others in their mother's womb. Then He is born in a manger. This Jesus is a baby. He can't talk; all He can do is cry. He's not even in control of his own bowels—He's a baby—He has to be changed. He can't say: Bring me this and go do that. He cries out and his mother—a teenage girl—has got to figure out: What does the baby need?

- He can't take care of Himself.
- He can't protect Himself.
- He is totally vulnerable.

He humbled Himself. He humbled himself—and then it says: ...not only did he become a man but he also humbled himself.

Now here's what I've found in life: God will put you in some circumstances and situations that might be pretty humiliating, but you still have to choose to humble yourself. God humbles no man. God will allow things to happen [and] it will seem like God is humbling me, but it's an attitude of the heart that you choose—that you choose: I humble myself before You [God].

And so the choice that we have to make every day is that I choose this day to be humble before God:

- So that I can be of use to my fellow man

- So that I can serve
- So I won't go out and just be concerned about myself
- ...and making my reputation
- ...and making myself out to be something
- But I choose to be nothing

And as I do He fills me. And so I humble myself before God. It's hard to make ourselves nothing because nothing really has no value. But when we're empty of self, we are then filled with Jesus.

Second thing that he says in *Revelations*—in another scripture, rather—is: When God does this, when God made Jesus, when God became a man, and people looked inside that manger—I wonder what they thought? It's another poor child born to a poor couple, who can't even afford to feed him.

And so now they're looking at this and many times we have the tendency to judge what an ending will be by looking at the beginning. But—man!—would they have ever misjudged Jesus? Here He is in a manger, a little baby, teenage parents, can't even afford to stay at an inn and get food, and they're thinking: This is just another case of a poor family having children when they had no business having children. But little did they know that that child was:

- The King of the universe
- The Son of God
- The Savior of the world

Who one day, when He was through making atonement for sin, (that) the very heavens themselves would open up those gates and in would come the King of Glory.

The Apostle John gets a glimpse of this in *Revelation, chapter 1, verse 5*.

⁵ ...To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, ⁶ and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and father – to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen. ⁷ Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen.

Revelation 1:5b-7 (NIV)

He is the King of Glory. That little baby in a manger, who humbled Himself, who paid the penalty for sin, the Bible says: God now has highly exalted Him and given Him a name over every other name that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. [*Philippians 2:9-12* (paraphrased)]

It is a good thing to be humble before God. So that's why Peter tells us in *chapter 5, verse 6*:

Humble yourself, therefore, {—if Jesus humbled Himself and God exalted Him, you humble yourselves—} under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.

1 Peter 5:6 (NIV)

First thing we have to be, if we're going to live Immanuel, is humble before God. If we're humble before God we're usable in His hands and we are useful for the people around us.

The second thing is that we have to be approachable.

LIVE IMMANUEL...IMITATE JESUS: BE APPROACHABLE

We have to be approachable—*1 John chapter 1, verse 1*:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched – this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.

1 John 1:1 (NIV)

"That which was from the beginning," eternal God—now look—we're looking at Him. We're talking to God, and that didn't happen back in the *Old Testament*. I told you, it was a pillar of fire that led them by night, it was a cloud that led the Israelites by day. It was this shaking/trembling mountain. They were so afraid [they said]: No, Moses, you go up; we can't stand His presence.

In the *Old Testament* when they had the tabernacle and then the temple, on the one day of the year that the high priest was to go in, take the blood of the lamb and sprinkle it on the mercy seat behind the curtain (where the presence of God was over the ark of the covenant), you know what they would do to that high priest? They would tie a rope on his leg, and they had bells around the bottom of his garment. And as long as they heard him in there moving around and the bells jingling, it was going well. If the bells would ever stop, they knew (that) that man was not fit to enter into the presence of God. And they would drag his dead body out by that rope; because they sure weren't going to go in there and get him. Then they would send another one in. That's how they viewed God.

God was teaching them: I am Holy; I cannot be approached. There is somebody who's going to have to pay for your sin before you can come into My presence and it can only be one person. If the person that you send in is not fit in My eyes—has not atoned for his own sin first—then I'm going to kill him. I am a Holy God. My eyes are so holy, I cannot even look upon sin.

But now look at God. He's in a manger. He's approachable:

- The shepherds come up and look at Him.
- The wise men go out and seek for Him.
- Mary and Joseph are with Him.
- Mary is cuddling Him.

There He is. They're touching the hand of God. They're looking into the face of God.

All through His ministry, what did people think about Jesus? They flocked to Him:

- The lepers, who nobody wanted to be around, would come to Jesus. And Jesus would touch them—that touch that said: I hear you. I know how you feel. I'm here for you. When He touched them their skin would once again be clean.
- The prostitutes, who were rejected—who were the scourge to most of those men that were religious—they flocked to Jesus. He knew who they were, yet He was approachable.
- Little children would come to Jesus. They loved Jesus.
- People wanted to be around His teaching because He had authority. He had the truth but He also had this massive, massive amount of love that came with the truth.
- The demon possessed wanted to be around Jesus so they could get un-possessed.

Jesus was approachable.

What about us? Are we approachable? Can we say in a minute: God, You can interrupt my day any time You want. Because it's not my day, because I've already humbled myself before You and You're filling me. So whatever the day holds, I will be approachable:

- So when that person cuts you off—it's a divine appointment—slow down, don't get mad at them.
- When your in-laws and your out-laws show up—that's a divine appointment—be approachable.

People need the touch of Jesus. People need to know that God cares for them.

Boy, I love *John, chapter 1, verse 14*, "The Word became flesh"—God, Whom no man has ever seen, now is seen. There He is. He's in the flesh. And because He was in the flesh, He knows what trouble is like down here:

- He knows what it feels like to be tempted. He has been tempted in more ways than you could ever possibly imagine. He has been tempted every way that a man could possibly be tempted yet He was without sin.
- He knows what it's like to lose loved ones. He knows what it's like when His friends die.
- He knows what it's like to be hungry.
- He knows what it's like to be thirsty.
- He certainly knows what it's like to feel misunderstood
- ...and to be rejected by people
- ...and to be deserted by His friends.

Jesus knows that.

So when we come to Him, He's not like any other person when we're talking to them and they don't get it and we say to them: You just don't understand me. You don't know what I'm going through. You don't know how it feels to be treated like that. Jesus says: Yes I do. Come to Me. Come to Me, I know how you feel. Come to Me, I know what you need. Come to Me, I know you need to be loved and you need to be accepted. Come to Me.

I love what the writer of *Hebrews* says—He [Jesus] knows our weaknesses and our struggles:

¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet [was] without sin. {Listen! Ready?

Here it is—*verse 16, chapter 4*—jot it down; you’re going to need it when you leave here.} ¹⁶ Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Hebrews 4:15-16 (NIV)

Do you think back in the *Old Testament* that those people had a lot of confidence when they went behind the veil to meet with God? No! If they were to touch the mountain, He said: Moses, I’ll kill them if they touch this mountain. Those that rebelled against God, the earth opened and swallowed them up. He was to be feared.

And now He says: I’m your friend because of what my Son has done by paying for the sin of this world all of the barriers are down. That’s why in the Bible when Christ died, it says that from the top of the veil to the bottom of the veil— that separated the holy of holies in the temple—tore it from top to bottom. Come in now.

- Now it is not a throne of fear
- Now it is not a throne that you can’t look at God
- Now it is a throne of grace

Grace: Come in. I know how you feel. I sympathize with you. I know what it’s like to live down there. Come in to My throne. And it’s not peals of thunder and lightening, but it’s wave after wave of love and mercy and grace that you will find so you will find help in time of need.

So let me ask you something: Why aren’t you praying? Why aren’t you running in to the throne of grace so that you can find grace and mercy in your time of need? You know why?—because you’re not humbling yourself. You can handle it. No, you can’t, but you think so—you can handle it. You can’t. I’m telling you: Don’t! Get down on your knees and get to the throne of grace. That’s where you are going to find what you need.

Well, does Jesus know? Yes, He knows. Yes, He knows.

We have to be humble.

We have to be approachable.

And then we have to be willing to be the underdog.

LIVE IMMANUEL...IMITATE JESUS: BE THE UNDERDOG

We have to be willing to be the underdog.

How many of you watched that glorious football game last night? I’m not even a Cowboys fan and I liked it. The Cowboys—the underdog—what did they do? They went in there and they beat a 13-and-0 team. They hit that place—pardon the pun—like a hurricane. Now the underdog wins.

- Everybody was betting against them
- They lost two games in a row

- All types of turmoil going on there
- The fact that Jerry Jones is their owner ought to be enough to go against them

But they go in and win. They win the game. Everybody—look, I'm not a Cowboys fan, but I was rooting for them. Why? Everybody loves to see an underdog win. When it's impossible, they love stories where the impossible becomes possible.

Well you know what? Mary knows exactly how that felt when she was told by the angel: You're going to have a baby.

[Mary:] I'm a virgin.

[Angel:] I know; don't worry about it. The Holy Spirit of God's going to overshadow you and your offspring is going to be called the Holy One of God.

[*Luke 1:35* (paraphrased)]

So she answers, she goes: " 'How will this be,' Mary asked the angel, 'since I am a virgin?' " [*Luke 1:34* (NIV)]

Do you know what the Angel said? "...nothing is impossible with God." [*Luke 1:37* (NIV)]

Nothing is—nothing. So what does that mean? That means nothing. You're a virgin. You're not going to have sexual intercourse, but you're going to have a baby. Guess what that is?—impossible with men; possible with God.

Right now some of you are in some impossible situations:

- In your marriage
- With your kids
- ...your businesses

And it looks like you're the underdog and all the odds are welled up against you. Let me tell you: that's the kind of game God likes to get in on. He is not always for the bigger and the best. He's for the underdog, He is for the Marys and for the Josephs and for the lepers and for the prostitutes and for the down-and-out and for the up-and-out, who think there is no hope; there is in God—there is in God.

So whatever it is that you think you are up against, you are up against it with God. God's always for the underdog. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego: I'd say they were the underdogs. They were thrown into the fiery furnace. Who was there with them? The pre-incarnate Son of God, Jesus Christ, walking around in the flames:

- I'm for the underdog.
- I'm for the orphan that calls out to God.
- I'm for those who think there is no hope and there is no help.

Look unto Jesus. He's an underdog. He knows what it's like. He knows what it's like.

How will this be possible? You know one thing people struggle with? They always struggle with this: I'm just not good enough to be saved. Nobody could be as bad as me. Well, you know what? That's a source of pride, actually, to think you're the worst person in the world. You're not—you're not—there are other people that are worse than you are. But we think:

- I've done this, how could God be for me?
- How could God (you know) want to save me?
- I'm so far behind the curve.
- I've wasted so much of my life.

Well, let me tell you: that's the kind of people that God wants, believe it or not.

In *1 Corinthians, chapter 1*, here's what the Apostle Paul says:

²⁶ Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; {Those that seemed like they wasted their life away and all of a sudden they get a brand new life.} God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.

1 Corinthians 1:26-27 (NIV)

Maybe you're in an addiction and you think: I'm never going to be able to get saved until I stop this. No, you're never going to stop it until you get saved.

²⁷ ...God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.
²⁸ He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – {Why?} to nullify the things that are,
²⁹ so that no one may boast before him.

1 Corinthians 1:27b-29 (NIV)

God is for the underdog and we ought to be for the underdog. Do you know why?—because we're all underdogs.

Then finally, if we're going to live like Immanuel we have to live courageously.

LIVE IMMANUEL...IMITATE JESUS: BE COURAGEOUS

The Lord Jesus is probably the most—no, He is—the most courageous man that ever lived. Jesus stared death in the face and Satan in the face and sin in the face and He overcame every one of them. Did He know what it was going to cost?—certainly He did. In fact, in the garden of Gethsemane you will find Him praying. He prays so hard, and the pressure was so intense as He thought about what He is getting ready to do, that literally His capillaries burst and His sweat was blood coming out of His body. Here is what He said at the end of that prayer: Not my will but Your will. [*Matthew 26:39* and *Luke 22:42* (paraphrased)]

And that courageous Son of God—

- Though all of his friends deserted Him (and)
- They lied (and)
- They mocked Him (and)
- They falsely charged Him (and)
- They beat Him and scourged Him (and)

Anytime He could have said: Enough! I am going to obliterate all of you. But yet He went to the cross knowing that He would sacrifice His life. And the darkest day of all, when sin was placed on the Son of God, He didn't shirk one moment. He cried out: "My God, my God, why have

you forsaken me?" [*Matthew 27:46* and *Mark 15:34*] But he never stopped because He was courageous enough to save you and to save me and to prove His love—sacrificially courageous.

Will we be courageous?

- Will we say no to what is wrong?
- Will we say yes to what is right?
- Will we sacrifice for those who have nothing?
- Will we be courageous and fight for our marriages?
- ...and fight for our families?
- ...and fight for what is right?
- ...to be able to preach the Gospel?
- ...to be able to share with the world that Jesus loves [them]?

Or, will we back up and, for the sake of political correctness—

- Won't talk about the blood of Christ
- Won't say what sin is
- Won't tell people there is only one way to Heaven (and then)
- We won't tell people there's only one way to be married
- We won't tell people that sin is wrong

We lack courage when we are like that and it doesn't help folks.

What if Jesus said: Well, you know there [are] some things—you know, sometimes they get a little bit muddled. And you know, well, adultery really it's not that bad. You know, I can understand a couple of things there. And, you know what? I really don't have to die. Well, if that's the case, He would have never gone and shed His blood. It's sin:

- It's dark
- It's horrid
- It ruins lives
- It takes down nations

And Jesus had the courage to stand and die on the cross for us.

We ought to have the courage to stand for Jesus, folks, if we're going to live Immanuel. So what does it mean when we live Immanuel?

WHEN WE LIVE LIKE GOD IS WITH US, OTHERS SEE CHRIST IN US

Do you know why people are attracted to Jesus? Because—Man!—He wasn't like anybody they've ever met—anybody.

- No one loved like Jesus
- No one talked like Jesus
- No one taught like Jesus

They just loved being with Jesus.

And when we die to ourselves, we humble ourselves, we become approachable, [and] we get courage to speak of Christ. When that begins to happen, that's not us; that's Jesus. And when people get around us they say: You know what? You're different—not in a bad way—but in a

good way different. What is it about you? [We can say:] Well, you know, I follow Christ. What you sense is Christ in me. When we live like God is with us, others see Christ in us.

WHEN WE SHOW IMMANUEL, THEY CAN KNOW JESUS

Here's what is going to happen in your house: lots of people are going to come over that you only see one time a year—and there is a reason behind that. There's a lot of stuff that starts getting dredged up from the past that—you know what?—you just don't want to hear, don't want to be a part of, don't like those people; but it's Christmas and we've got to have them at the house. Well, what if [we do] this:

- What if we live like God is with us?
- ...we talk like and we love like and we cared like God was with us?
- We were humble?
- We were approachable?
- We were courageous?

What if that happened? Do you know what I think? They would walk away from your Christmas gathering saying: Wow! That was different. Man! That person, they changed.

Maybe it could be this Christmas that you can reconcile some things that have been fracturing your family for a very long time. Nobody wants to talk about it because—

- No one is courageous enough to speak the truth in love
- Nobody is humble enough to say: I'm sorry.
- Nobody is approachable enough to say: You are welcome no matter what you've done or who you are. You have a place here at the table with us.

Can you imagine (perhaps) enjoying seeing each other more than once a year because of that?

Or, stuff is finally out in the open and is dealt with and you have given forgiveness. Do you have the courage to give forgiveness and not hold it against anybody anymore? And do you know what? Even if they wouldn't admit to it and you forgave them and they weren't even appreciative, would you be humble enough to know that's just the way life is? And I am going to follow Jesus, because He forgave a whole lot of people that could [sic] care less too. Your family and your life would be different.

THE BEST GIFT YOU WILL EVER LIVE IS IMMANUEL

It's the best gift God's given you. I'm giving you God—God's inside of us—it's the best gift you will ever live. The best gift you will ever give is Jesus. The best gift you'll ever receive is Jesus.

If you're here this morning and you do not know who Christ is, He's here now. He is with us. He is the One that's been speaking to you. He is the One that's making you feel kind of weird right now. [If] you can't wait to get out of here, that's the devil pushing you. But God is with us and He wants you to have a brand new life; that's why He died. And so we're going to pray and if you want Christ in your heart, I'm going to ask you to pray this very simple prayer. Lets close our eyes and bow our heads and if you've never known Jesus but you want to, I'm going to ask you to pray this prayer right here; it goes like this:

Jesus, I know I am a sinner. I believe You died on that cross for me. I believe: as a baby You were God; as a man You were God; and now You are still God. And I ask You to save me, forgive me of my sin, and come into my life.

And Father, for the rest of us, this is God-with-us season, Immanuel, Christmas. And, God, I pray that You would use us wherever You are going to go and we would live like Immanuel, God is with us, so that others would see Jesus in us and they would receive the gift of Christ. In His Name we pray. Amen.

If you just prayed that prayer, on that bulletin you received when you came in, there is a portion you can tear off. There is a box that [says]: I just prayed to follow Christ. Would you check that box and let me know who you are? [I would] love to follow up with you, give you information about what it means to be a follower of Christ, and take some next steps. So if you're serious about that, just fill that out. And, in a moment when we receive our morning offering, put that in the plate as it comes by along with the rest of our gifts as well.

I am going to ask our ushers to get in place. [I have] a couple of announcements before we are dismissed—before we take our offering, rather.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Number one, let me brag on you guys. You precious people gave \$480,000 to the *Big Give* to support all of our causes around the world. I am so humbled and so grateful for you and your sacrifice in your giving. I had somebody after the third service stop me and say: Hey, can we just give today or is there another day? I said: We are open 52 weeks out of the year, my friend; we'll take it any day. So if you still need to give, you're more than welcome to give to the *Big Give*.

In fact, we told you about Samuel earlier. You remember the orphan that we interviewed and kind of broke all of our hearts? Well, that's Samuel before [gesturing to the picture displayed on the side screens]. This is Samuel after [second picture displayed]. We have sent a little bit of money over there and gotten him some help. He is now in school. He has a tutor because he is far behind. He has clothes and food and he just wanted to—by Henry [Sseviiri]—he told us: Thank you so very much. And there is even a couple in our church that is trying to start the process of adopting Samuel. So he may be a church member here pretty soon, before you know it. So, thank you for your giving. There are some updated videos that, if you will check the *Big Give* Web site, there are some updated videos for you to check out during the week.

Two Christmas Eve services—and by the way in case you didn't know, Christmas Eve is the 24th this year—at 5 p.m. and 7 p.m. (two Christmas Eve services—five and seven). Come early so you can get a seat.

Prayer Summit: January 22nd through the 24th. We're gathering together as a church Friday night the 22nd. We'll be teaching on prayer and praying together on Saturday morning, and then Sunday morning as well. Mark your calendar. You will find out more about it as the weeks go by.

And then the 27th of this month, which is this Sunday after Christmas, three worship services, no small groups, but childcare from birth through K-5. Okay?

Let's pray together and then Pastor Zach [King, *Student and College* pastor] is going to come out and close us. Let's pray and ask God to bless this offering.

Lord, thank You for Your generosity of Your people and because they gave, we can live Immanuel all over this world. And I pray that You bless this offering as we give to You now. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Lead Pastor: Dr. Sal Sberna

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If you give, you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full measure, pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, and running over. Whatever measure you use—large or small—it will be used to measure what is given back to you.

Luke 6:38

(New Living Translation)

Legend:

(words in parentheses) = spoken by the preacher *but unnecessary* to the core sentence idea

[words in square brackets] = additional explanation for clarity *not spoken* by the preacher

{words in curly brackets within indented quote} = spoken explanation *not part of the quote*