



December 17, 2006

## The One Word

Several years ago a movie came out that I didn't particularly like but I must admit that I was reminded of this movie this past week. What movie? Home Alone. It's a story about a young boy that's upset that no one in his family is paying attention to him. He throws a temper tantrum and is sent to his room. He's so angry that he wishes that his family would just go away so that he could be alone. The next day he gets his wish the family leaves for a European vacation at Christmas in all the rush and excitement of getting the whole family to the airport and getting on the plane and everything they forget their son. He's alone and he's so excited. He eats nothing but junk food, watches movies whenever he wants and sleeps wherever he wants he's not accountable to anyone. Then burglars try to break in the house. He foils them with the whole array of several ingenious booby traps but he realizes he's lonely; he's scared he wants his family back. It's similar to the story of mankind. In the Garden of Eden everything was just fine but Adam and Eve wanted more just as we tend to want more. They wanted and we want to be able to do whatever we want and for millenniums we've reveled in it. At the same time we feel lonely and people have a problem with a certain emptiness in their hearts which leads to our sermon today; the one word.

Last week it was the four words, "lying in a manger", today it is one word; "Emmanuel", which means in three words "God with us". As we saw last week God didn't come in a cameo role he came for 33 years. He wasn't in a palace sheltered from the common folk he was born in a manger and as he grew he touched the leper, gave sight to the blind, made the lame to walk, the deaf to hear, the mute to speak and had concern for those who were hungry and fed them. What a comparison. It had always been God over us, God above us, God before us, God on the mountain, God in the temple, God in the cloud and now it was God with us. Imagine how sorrowful this Christmas would be if God had left His creation which had rejected Him and put

Him to death never to come again. A perfect life, a perfect love abandoning those who never appreciated it, wanted it or sought it. Isn't that what all of us would do? That thought becomes the world's worst nightmare. As we've already seen the glory of Christmas is not the pageants or the decorations or the music is the truth that God desired to draw nearer to His sinful creation to be Emmanuel "God with us". And what does this mean for us? Three great things.

First of all it means we are more precious to God than we can ever imagine. I know that I've used that dreaded word sin a number of times over the last couple of months. The fact is that when I take an honest look at myself and gaze into the spiritual mirror of God's word I have to hang my head in shame. I realize I am a disgrace compared to God's perfect attributes. I saw a t-shirt that pretty well sums me up. It was gray and it simply said, "I'm the wretch the song talks about". Yet "Emmanuel, God with us" is so profoundly merciful and gracious that He desires to be with me and He desires to be with you and all of us. Its not about how wonderful we are that God wants to be with us its all about God. I, we don't deserve it and he loves us and we are the beneficiaries of His love. That's why the hymn is called "Amazing Grace" the thing I least deserve from Him is the thing He offers to me.

Number two it means there is far more to celebrate than we thought. You see, Christmas is like a wedding the coming together of God and man. Its beautiful and filled with joy unfortunately like in too many marriages today we rejected God and killed Him on the cross. This is why C.S. Lewis that Christian author who also wrote *The Chronicles of Narnia*, he calls this the "Great Divorce". As humans in a divorce we would expect God to be bitter and seek revenge not our God He's committed to us. Who else would return unfaithfulness, abandonment and apathy with such an act? Who? Only Emmanuel, God with us.

And finally Emmanuel means, we will never be alone. The true celebration of Christmas then is the understanding that lying in a manger is God with us, Emmanuel. And just as He valued us, loved us enough to come and give His life for us He keeps on giving and He still is with us. His last words were, "surely I am with you always to the very end of the age". We are never alone we have Emmanuel, God with us, who knows what we feel, who knows our struggles, who shares in our joy and in our pain, because he's been there he's done it God with us was and is proof of His commitment to us.

So what is our response to this commitment? Trees, lights, manger scenes, eggnog, advent wreaths? No, not really. There's only one proper response and again I was reminded of a movie. The movie Robin Hood that had Kevin Costner in it. Kevin Costner who plays Robin saves the life of a Muslim who was played by Morgan Freeman. He does this at the risk of his own life. Once they're free and away from the prison and all those that were chasing them he tells Morgan Freeman, "you're free go back to your people, your country, your family". To which Morgan Freeman says, "Christian you have saved my life I am indebted to you and will go with you and serve you for the rest of my life".

Christmas is often a time of strife and it results in friends, family and acquaintances being ignored which is bad enough but when we treat God as ornamental we ignore the one who sacrificed His own son who gave His own life to be intimate with us. Christmas is a time to do more than decorate our homes and trees and gifts. It is time to make a commitment back to God to decorate our life with His continual presence as we welcome our Savior not just on Christmas but everyday. Christmas is the ultimate celebration of the fulfillment of Isaiah's promise, "the Lord Himself will give you a sign the virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son and we'll call Him Emmanuel". And He most certainly is Emmanuel, God with us. Always has been always will be our loving Savior.

In our Savior's name, Amen.