

The Immanuel Agenda
John 1:14ff

It's Christmas time again. It's time to focus on the coming of Christ and be full of good cheer. The problem is that if we focus in a certain way we only end up depressed. If Christmas is a season to redouble your efforts to live by WWJD, then I think you may be in for a rough holiday season.

The problem with that approach is that it can easily be turned into a view that says, "Jesus came as an example of how we are to live our lives; just copy him, do what he did and we'll be okay."

SO WHERE'S THE PROBLEM?

Have you ever REALLY TRIED to live as he lived? If so, then I dare say that you ended up **F-I-N-E** :

Frustrated

Irritated

Neurotic

Exhausted

WHY? Because when we get our eyes focused on WWJD we lose sight of WDJC –Why Did Jesus Come?

Why did he come? Why did the eternal son of God take on human flesh and human nature? Why did the godhead veil itself in human flesh? Why did he lay his glories by?

HE CAME TO FULFILL THE IMMANUEL AGENDA OF THE TRIUNE God.

14And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. 15John *testified about Him and cried out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.'" 16For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. 17For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. 18No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained *Him*.

This agenda is the thread that runs throughout all of scripture from the OT to the NT and finds its fulfillment in the Incarnation at Christmas

It can be summed up this way, "**I WILL BE YOUR God, AND YOU WILL BE MY PEOPLE AND I WILL DWELL IN YOUR MIDST.**"

It's an eternal agenda that plays itself out in the relationship between God and His people:

In the Garden of Eden

In promising salvation to come from the seed of the woman

In calling Abraham to be the Father of the faithful

In God's covenant faithfulness as he renews the promise to Isaac, Jacob and their descendants

In the Exodus of Israel and their entrance into the Promised land

In the establishment and expansion of the kingdom under David and Solomon

In the discipline and restoration of rebellious Israel

In the words of hope and promise in the Prophets

In the arrival of the Messiah – in the fullness of time born of the seed of a woman.

In his gospel, his letters and the Book of the Revelation John speaks of Him who is the light and who is the Word made Flesh. John points out that God with us means that our real and only hope is drawing near to God; His presence with us is our good and when we realize that then we'll be satisfied.

John 6:35 I am the bread of Life, whoever believes in me will not hunger or thirst.

Jesus not only gives meaning to life, but he gives a sure hope for the future. Jesus has come to make everything new, but the ultimate hope is a future hope. Jesus does give life, and hope, and peace, and joy in this life, but the ultimate focus is on the glory to be revealed. If you sign on to Christianity simply for “YOUR BEST life now”, then you’ve made a mistake and you’ve underestimated the power of the gospel.

The message of Christmas contains in it a potential for heartache and for unspeakable joy. Heartache - because we may be tempted to think that Jesus will make life a bed of roses.

When reality strikes we can be greatly disappointed. There are legitimately desired blessings that we won’t experience in this life; instead we experience the good with the bad. But reality is that Jesus told us, “in this world you have tribulation...”

Unspeakable Joy – because Jesus goes on to say, “but take courage for I have overcome the world.” JOHN 14: 1-2, 36 This world with all of its pain and sorrow is not our final resting place – that is GOOD NEWS. If we simply hope for a better life here and now we lose out on the transforming power of the ultimate hope of the gospel – 1 John 3:1-3

Larry CRABB – **“We cannot count on God to protect us from suffering of any kind or measure. The worst evil can happen to the best Christian. But we can count on God to enable us to draw near to Him whatever happens, and eventually, to experience deep joy when we do.”**

We can count on God to do at least three things in our lives: The Immanuel Agenda- Give us a real encounter with Him; Lead us into Community; Bring inner transformation

1) To give us a real encounter with Him – “God with us” In dealing with his people God has always focused on the encounter with Him. It is His presence that makes all the difference.

The call of Moses – “take off your shoes; this is a holy place” Why? Because of the presence of God.

The Exodus – Ex.19 “I have brought you to myself”

Numbers 9 – “the blessing... make his face to shine upon you”

Psalm 23 – The Lord is My shepherd

Psalm 16 – “in thy presence is fullness of joy”

Ezekiel 34:30-31 “They will know that I the Lord their God am with them”

Luke 1: 68-69 Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, For he has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people.”

The God who thundered from MT. Sinai has come as a baby. He made himself vulnerable, weak, helpless because that is what we are. Jesus took on the full human experience so that no matter what age we are we can identify with him.

When the miracle of Incarnation and encounter grabs hold of our souls we’ll worship – not just on Sunday morning at 11am.

One way to know you have encountered Him is that the awe and wonder of life now has a reference point; the impersonal higher power is known and worshipped by name – Jesus.

EX: as college freshman – looking at the stars and being overwhelmed, feeling small, sensing that there must be more. Although I’d grown up in the church I hadn’t really come to faith in Christ, so the wonder didn’t really make sense. NOW it all points to the personal creator God who made himself known in Jesus.

2.) We can count on God to lead us to community -

Those who encounter God will be attracted to others who are encountering God. People who share a similar story are drawn together. Christians are people who share a similar story – “I once was lost but now and found, was blind but now I see.” “Naked come to thee for dress, helpless come to thee for grace; foul I to the fountain fly, wash me savior or I die.”

EX: encountering someone who shares a common interest but you didn't know it before – you have a new bond.

EX: On the train from Helsinki Finland to Narvik Norway – a group of partying Finns were having a good time. Then at a stop a group of 3-4 American college students gets on the train. We didn't know them but they spoke English – it was instant bonding.

HOW MUCH MORE WHEN WE ARE JOINED TOGETHER BY Holy Spirit!!!! (Christians in France)

3.) We can count on God to be at work transforming us.

God will use the community to do this work. “An encounter with God and an experience in community will open our eyes to see how unlike Jesus we really are.”

God is the one who is in control of our growth. There is a working together by the power of the Holy Spirit, but the Spirit is at work even when we aren't.

LOVELACE – “The rate and depth at which progress in sanctification takes place is determined by the Holy Spirit. The process can't be rushed by overloading the heart with the law. It can be promoted by delighting in the gospel. In order for the flesh to be displaced to make room for newness of life we must see the superior value of new affection. This comes through meditating on the gospel of the grace of God in Christ. This takes place as our hearts and minds are renewed by the Holy Spirit applying His Word in a way that enlightens the eyes of the heart and gives spiritual wisdom and understanding” (Ephesians 1:17ff; 3:14ff)

The Holy Spirit “will give believers the passion and wisdom of Christ to respond to every challenge they meet in life.” – Crabb

These things are ours **IN CHRIST** by grace through **FAITH**. We can't reach out and touch them, but we can have a true knowledge of them through faith.

In order to create and nurture the life of intimacy with Christ, God Himself directs our lives to draw us to Himself. He is even working **ALL THINGS TOGETHER FOR THE GOOD** for those who love him and are called according to His purpose. It may not always look like God is in control, but he is. He might not always look like he is all wise or that His agenda is on track, but it is.

The **GOOD** that God is creating may not be the same good that we have in mind. We think good means a better life, better health, more money, a better house, better car, better kids, better spouse, or a better job.

CRABB – “What is God's plan? To give us a better life now as we define it? No, It's to reveal Himself as the greatest treasure the human heart could ever imagine, to draw people into relationship with Him that utterly delights their souls. It's the Immanuel Agenda.”

The biblical perspective is “The **NEARNESS OF God IS MY GOOD**.” Often that nearness is prompted and cultivated in times of trial. Right after **ROMANS 8:28** comes **Romans 8:38-39**. here Paul is saying, by the Holy Spirit, that even all the bad things of life can't keep us from knowing the love God in Christ Jesus.

HOW CAN PAUL SAY THIS? Because the baby in the manger became the man on the cross, who became the risen and ascended Lord of glory so that we might be reconciled to God.

The work of Christ is of such quality, depth, breadth, and glory that Paul can say that it trumps everything else in life and even death.

DO YOU KNOW HOW TO PLAY YOUR Jesus CARD?

The Immanuel Agenda, “**God WITH US**”, brings great promises but remember that the Incarnation at the first Christmas was the first coming of Christ.

During this in between time we wait and hope for the full consummation of the promises. So as we wait remember:

1). Our hearts are still slippery and remaining indwelling sin means that we won't always love and treasure God as we should. The result will be sin and sometimes it gets really ugly.

Don't ever grow accustomed to it, but don't ever be too surprised by it. Hate it, fight the fight of faith against it, but remember that we're all in this together WITH God.

2). We'll never have perfect community in this life; we'll see change and relationships healed but we won't relate perfectly to anyone.

3.) We won't be totally transformed until heaven.

Unlike those groups that think you can arrive at a state of total sanctification in this life, we understand that the Christian life is a process that lasts the whole life. There will always be room for growth.

CHEER UP

Crabb – “The simple truth is we'll be a mess until heaven”, but we can expect real and substantial change (Francis Schaeffer)

Merry Christmas, right??

THE Savior IN THE MANGER IS A REALITY

– God is with us as we sort through the mess; he came to take our mess upon himself. He got what our mess deserves so that we can get what his righteousness deserves.

That is the heart of The Immanuel Agenda.

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