

Touching Emmanuel

This past Wednesday night my daughter, Juliana mentioned how much the Bible Study meant to her. It blessed me for her to make this comment, because this subject is so very dear to my heart as well. Since Wednesday I have been much in prayer for our flock at Christchurch and our many friends outside the parameters of our fellowship who join us by this column as well as our podcast services. Some of you were providentially unable to join us for Bible Study, so permit me to bring you into the highlights of our study.

In fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14, the New Testament declares Jesus as God who has come in the flesh: *"And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us"* (Matthew 1:21-23). As Jesus grew and matured, He walked in and out the daily events of the people of Israel. Shortly before our Lord began His personal ministry, John the Baptist said, *"I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not; He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose"* (John 1:26,27). How amazing! The Prince of Glory, God With Us was walking in and out among the daily lives of mortal man unrecognized!

As brave souls with faith pursued Jesus, we see occasions like that which was mentioned in Matthew 9:20 and 21 occurring, *"And, behold, a woman, which was diseased with an issue of blood twelve years, came behind him, and touched the hem of his garment: For she said within herself, If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole."* And the woman was right, for our Lord immediately healed her continuing problem of twelve years. Today I sense many are longing to touch Jesus. In other words, to have our Lord real to them and to meet them in their deepest need. I fear we have insulated our people from experience by so emphasizing the need not to trust experience over the dogmatism of Scriptural understanding. We sometimes unknowingly play down the experience of Jesus by putting the Word in competition with real experience. This ought not to be done. God's Word teaches that we may indeed experience God. Would you like to touch Jesus - Emmanuel? You may if you:

1. Look Up

"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard" (Psalm 19:1-3). Senior Science writer, Robert Roy Britt writes, "Astronomers have detected the deepest note ever generated in the cosmos, a B-flat flying through space like a ripple on an invisible pond." The discovery was made by NASA's Chandra X-ray Observatory and is said to be fifty-seven octaves below the keys in the middle of a piano. I never cease to marvel how science eventually catches up with God. Over three thousand years before the observatory made this discovery, God speaks through the Psalmist of the "voice" from deep space. I expect one day to hear a symphony from space, as science advances by simply capturing the harmony of the heavens. On a somewhat less exotic route, I would challenge any of you to simply go outside and look up. Should you be a skeptical unbeliever or simply a busy Christian, take a break, go outside and look up. Realistically, most of the ones reading this article are not the skeptics, you are a busy Christian. That's one reason you read this column. It's quick, not demanding, and you can do it between emails. But it's going to take time to hear God, therefore, please take the time.

One of the most memorable Father-Son Campouts we enjoyed was when Charles Cochran brought his son's magnificent telescope to the outing. There I was on Galveston Beach approaching midnight, standing in line with the boys just to get a look at Saturn and Mars. As I looked into the heavens and beheld the planets, I heard that still small voice, assuring me that all the guys around me, the girls back home, all the people who call me pastor and, frankly all the people of the world, were the

prime object of this great and wonderful God who is defined as Love.

My mind goes back to those words President Reagan borrowed at the memorial service for the crew of the Challenger in 1986, which originally came from a 19 year pilot who died in training in 1941. This young Royal Canadian pilot wrote this poem to his missionary parents after being inspired at 30,000 feet in the air. Some of his words read: "Oh! I have slipped the surly bonds of Earth. I've chased the shouting wind along, and flung my eager craft through footless falls of air...up, up the long, delirious, burning blue I've topped the wind-swept heights with easy grace where never lark, nor eagle flew--And, while with silent lifting mind I've trod the high, untrampled sanctity of space, put out my hand and touched the face of God." I needed that look through the telescope that night. Would you like to touch Emmanuel? You may if you:

2. Think Poetically

When Paul was witnessing to the heathen on Mars' hill, he said, "*For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring*" (Acts 17:28). The apostle gave us insight into who came the closest to understanding the mystery of God; it was the poets. Whether G.K. Chesterton had this passage in mind when he wrote his chapter entitled, *The Maniac* in his famous book entitled *Orthodoxy*, I am not sure, but his words blend with this concept perfectly. Chesterton was writing these words to an agnostic and they are as powerful today as when he wrote them in the early days of the Twentieth Century. He said, "Imagination does not breed insanity. Exactly what does breed insanity is reason. Poets do not go mad; but chess-players do. Everywhere we see men do not go mad by dreaming. Critics are much madder than poets. Homer is complete and calm enough; it is his critics who tear him into extravagant tatters. Shakespeare is quite himself; it is only some of his critics who have discovered that he was somebody else. And though St. John the Evangelist saw many strange monsters in his vision, he saw no creature so wild as one of his own commentators. The general fact is simple. Poetry is sane because it floats easily in an infinite sea, and so make it finite. The result is exhaustion. To accept everything is an exercise, to understand everything is a strain. The poet only desires exaltation and expansion, a world to stretch himself in. The poet only asks to get his head into the heavens. It is the logician who seeks to get the heavens into his head. And it is his head that splits."

Sadly, the heads of many of my brethren are splitting and some go even further - they are proverbially splitting other's heads who don't see it exactly as they do. May we quit arguing over the diagnoses of many "soul" doctors, and may we reach out to the Great Physician and be healed. Allow your belief to embrace the solid Logos of God's Word, but be poetic and open your life up to personal experience with He who became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14)! Are you longing to touch Emmanuel? Again, I remind you, He is open to your touch and you may if you:

3. Turn Around

"Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master" (John 20:15,16). It is almost unbelievable that Mary mistook Jesus as the gardener. However, when she heard His voice, that unmistakable sound of God calling her name, she turned around giving Him the title of extreme respect - Rabboni! Think of it, there was the risen and living Lord just off her elbow, just behind her waiting for her to turn around. Christ is near, oh so near, yet we are missing Him.

Dr. Andrew Drieter had lost God while looking for Him in seminary at Yale University. By his own admission he later said, "My spiritual director helped me consider this possibility: the God of Scripture, the God who comes to us in Christ, is not simply personal, but 'suprapersonal.' Unfortunately, our tendency is to define 'personal' according to what we know of our relationships with persons. In

these interpersonal relationships there is always an uncrossable boundary between individuals. But God is more than personal. This expansive God in whom we have our being is closer to us than we are to ourselves. Our problem is that this supra-personal God is so close to us, in and through us, that we have difficulty identifying what parts of our lives are God and which bits are us. So close that we often miss the Christ in us and in the people we know and meet. So close that we often miss the presence of the Spirit in the world around us. God is that intimate."

I challenge you, with all my heart's desire, to slow down, turn around. Don't miss Jesus in all your busy-ness in serving Him. He is greater than all we do for Him. And without the reality of constant experience, we become believing agnostics. We miss the forest for the trees. Don't lose Jesus in your theology, service, and even rushed devotions. God has crossed all the boundaries in Jesus. Don't miss Him! Go ahead, reach out, touch Emmanuel. He's just a prayer away.

- Pastor Pope -

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