

Christmas 2024  
Matthew 1:21-23

Immanuel, the Lord is with us

We pray that the grace of Jesus Christ, Immanuel, who is with us through today's message, may abound to you.

Jesus came to the world because he saves sinners from the sin. Look at verse 21 of today's text. "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." There is no one righteous, not even one" (Rom. 3:10). The Bible says that no matter how morally superior human beings are, none of them are righteous before God. How do you know that no one is righteous before God? We know from the fact that every human being dies. "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 6:23)." The Bible says that death is the result of sin. If man cannot solve the problem of sin, he cannot enter heaven. God is in heaven. We cannot go to God because of our sin. Romans 3:23 "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." When we think of sin, we think only of ethical and moral sins, but the Bible says that the state of falling short of God's glory is sin. Jesus died on the cross to forgive us of our sins. All who believe in this gospel of grace will be saved. John 11:25-26. "Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

I learned a little about God's love for sinners during the reconciliation with my father. As I often told you in my testimony, my mom divorced my abusive father 18 years ago. And my sister and me didn't meet to my father for long years. But I and my sister became to be a pastor 3 years ago and we prayed for my father to forgive. And finally, I met my father for the first time in 18 years 3 years ago. But I could not hear his apology from him and he hurt me. He said, "I did not beat your mother, your sister, and you too. So why did you betray me?" He was furious and complained like those words. My father had not changed ever. As for me, I wanted my father to change and apologize to my family because he abused and destroyed my mom's life and mind. However, my father did not admit his fault at all. I was disappointed in my father's attitude. I went home and cried out to God with all my heart, "God, I don't want to forgive my father anymore." In my prayer, I felt like that God spoke to me in this way. "Daughter, I love your father as I love you. I shed my blood on the cross for you and for your father too." This took me by surprise. I thought to myself, "Jesus, if that is true, then you have wasted your blood. My father has not admitted his sin and has no remorse at all. Jesus died on the cross for a kind, good sinner like me, right?" To this question, Jesus replied, "No. I died on the cross for real sinners who break the rules and order of society and destroy families, too." I soon realized that these thoughts were not my thoughts but the Holy Spirit's. Then I realized

how wide and how deep the love of Jesus for sinners was. And I realized that if Jesus loves my Father, I cannot hate my father who is loved by Jesus. Ladies and gentlemen, after this painful forgiveness process, I still have not received a single word of apology from my father, but I have continued to interact in friendly. This is a miracle in my life that I cannot describe in one word. I thank God for His grace. I really appreciate your prayers.

By the way, what is the range of sinners you are thinking of? Can you forgive that person who has caused so much trouble in your life? In the process of forgiving my father, I realized that the range of sinners Jesus had in mind was quite broad, and I realized that the range of my own forgiveness needs to be broadened as well. To what extent are you forgiving sinners now?

Next, Jesus Christ came to this world for the sake of Immanuel. Look at [Matthew 1:23](#). “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel.” (which means, “God is with us”). It is an amazing grace that a holy God came into the world to be with sinners like us.

I heard about this Immanuel Jesus as a Christmas message when I was 13 years old. I was so amazed and touched that Jesus came to the world to be with me even though He is God. At that time, I was really lonely. As I mentioned earlier, I never had a day to rest because of my abusive father. My father gambled and played and didn't work, so my mother, who I loved and was kind to me, went to work every day. I was frightened every day by my father's violence and always felt alone. The words I heard at that time that Jesus was with me, “Immanuel, the Lord is with you,” were a great comfort to me in my difficult daily life. When I think of the message of Immanuel at that time, I feel warmth in my heart and that warmth continues to this day. It is an amazing grace.

When I studied the Bible in seminary, I was again surprised that the entire Bible refers to this ‘Immanuel’s God’. The Immanuel Jesus I encountered when I was little was the main idea of the Bible. God was with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden at creation. And when they sinned, He was with them, making leather clothes for them to wear. He was also with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden after He drove them out so that they would not eat of the tree of life. He was also with Noah, the righteous man and Abraham, the ancestor of faith, throughout their lives. God also promised Abraham's grandson Jacob when he fled from his brother's murderous intent and was sleeping in Bethel. [Genesis 28:15](#), “I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.” God was with Jacob throughout his tumultuous life. And He was also with Joseph, Jacob's eleventh son. In [Genesis 39](#), we read, “Because the Lord was with Joseph, he prospered and was in the house of his Egyptian master. God was with Joseph when he was abused by his brothers and sold into slavery in Egypt. God was also

with him when he refused the temptation of Potiphar's wife, the master of the house, and was falsely accused of attempted rape and sent to prison. The Bible says, “But the Lord was with Joseph; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden (v. 21).” He was with the Israelites every day in the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire mentioned in Exodus.

Do you really believe that God is with you? I spent my youth praying for my abusive father to become kind. At that time, I did not doubt that God was with me. I came to Japan for work and got married and my work went very well. However, I had no choice but to get divorced and began a long and painful child-rearing period. During I was raising my children, I forgot about God's presence with me. If God is really with me, why does my life continue to be such a struggle? I was constantly lamenting day after day that my life had become so embarrassing that I could not even evangelize to others.

You all remember well that in March of 2022, I took Kenta and Taishi to see their father for the first time in 16 years in order to reconcile with my ex-husband, don't you? At that time, my ex-husband had not changed at all like my father, and so I regretted having my children visit him. However, four months later I was invited to my former boss's retirement celebration and visited to Okinawa for the first time in 16 years. I had not been to Okinawa once in 16 years to protect my children from my ex-husband's violence.

At this time, I took a walk alone along the road in the middle of the Okinawa Prefectural Government Building and Naha City Hall where I worked. At this time, I suddenly called out to God. “God, I miss this road so much. By the way, God my Father, why didn't you stop me when I married my ex-husband? If God was really there, shouldn't He have told me that he was a wicked man, not to be deceived, and not to marry him?” Then this thought occurred to me as I was murmuring to myself in the hot, glistening sunlight. “My daughter, I told you in several ways that the way was not right. But you did not change your decision. I was disappointed because you chose the wrong path. But I was with you no matter what you decided. Because I love you. I blessed you with your job and took care of you so that you would not have financial difficulties. I protected you and your children from the dangers of your ex-husband's violence. And I blessed everything you were involved in.” I was given a great realization in this interaction with God. God was deeply involved in my life and was always with me. I also realized that God's blessings were abundant even in the midst of a tremendous environment of abuse and domestic violence.

When Joseph was sold into slavery, God was with him, but Joseph's slavery lasted for a while. In the same way, even though God was with me, my suffering continued. It was because of my bad decisions and mistakes, but God was always with me without blaming me. Looking back on my life, God took pity on me and protected me from my father's abuse. He also gave

me the gospel when I was as young as 13 years old. He was also with me throughout my homesickness in Okinawa, the violence of my ex-husband, and the difficulties of raising a child as a single mom. I realized that God knew very well the miserable circumstances of my life and came to me as a message of Immanuel when I was as young as 13 years old. The worse our circumstances are, the more God is with us. I can say now "Thank you, God my Father!"

But I spent a lot of time not realizing God's presence in this reality where He is with me. I realized later that it was because I mistakenly thought that God was with me when things were going well. God is always with us when things go wrong, in the midst of discord with my own family, divorce, difficult parenting, unemployment, broken relationships, school bullying, earthquake disaster, and other hard times in my life.

How about you? Are you realizing that God is with you? Jesus Christ, who came as a baby to the world for Immanuel, eventually became an adult and died on the cross. Jesus took the initiative and was always with His disciples, women, tax collectors, and the sick. Before his death on the cross, Jesus prayed this prayer. **John 14:16-18, "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever - the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you."** We who believe in the cross and resurrection of Jesus have the Holy Spirit in our hearts. Thank God for this wonderful gospel. Jesus Christ is with us as the Holy Spirit and will soon come again into the world to judge all evil and complete the Kingdom of God.

**Revelation 21:2-4, "I saw the Holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."** God has promised us a new earth, a new heaven, and a new Jerusalem through Jesus Christ. And Jesus Christ wipes away all our tears that we have shed in this world. Jesus Christ of Immanuel is with us in the past, present, and future. I pray that the Immanuel grace of our Savior, Jesus Christ, will overflow to me and to all of you. Merry Christmas!

Let's pray together. Loving Heavenly Father, we thank you for sending Jesus Christ to save us from our sins. And thank you for promising us the grace of Immanuel, who is always with us as the grace of believing in Jesus Christ. Please be with us and may comfort, joy, and gratitude overflow daily to our brothers and sisters who are suffering from illnesses and various problems, and to those who have lost their family members before them in heaven. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.