

Emmanuel: Walking in the Cool of the Day with the LORD

08/08/2021

Scripture 1: (Gen. 2:8-15 ESV)

And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers. The name of the first is the Pishon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. And the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. The name of the second river is the Gihon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Cush. And the name of the third river is the Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

Scripture 2: (Gen. 3:8-10 ESV)

And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?"

And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself."

Sermon:

Emmanuel, God is with us.

With us, God is.

Clearly it is not December. There is no snow on the ground outside *{even if I have taken to wearing flannel most days during these “so-called” summer months}*. There are no pretty Christmas lights up on the houses. Bells are not ringing. Carolers are not singing, especially not Burl Ives *{I personally have an intense dislike of “Holly Jolly Christmas”}*. It is August, so why am I preaching about Emmanuel?

Isn't “Emmanuel” just a song that we sing on Christmas Eve *{O Come, O Come Emmanuel}*?

Emmanuel. Isn't that a name for Jesus? - It is, and we shall speak more about that in a few weeks.

Emmanuel. The understanding and divine promise that “God is with us” is not limited to only one day a year, or to a single month, or even a full season. The idea that “God is with us” goes all the way back to the very beginning, back to the Garden of Eden, even though the Hebrew word of *emmanuel/immanuel* only appears three times in the middle of the Bible *{twice in the Old Testament [Isaiah 7:14, 8:8] and once in the New [Matthew 1:23]}*.

Emmanuel is seemingly a simple word, but it intimately describes the relationship between God and man. It is a relational idea that “God is with us” without suggesting, requiring, or even assuming that the reversed order is true, without saying that “we are with God”. That is why it is so special; it describes the relational feeling of the LORD towards His chosen people. *“If God is for us, who can be against us?”* (Romans 8:31 ESV, see also 2 Kings 6:15)

The LORD is the active One: generating, and nurturing this relationship, while we are the recipients and beneficiaries of His relational care. However, we are not passive members in this relationship for, since God requires our faithful response, He is also the One who inspires and empowers our response. He initiates this within our heart by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit. He gives us the desire to respond to His grace, positively. He gives us the strength and will to respond, joyfully.

He is the One who has revealed Himself to us in creation, in His Word (2 Timothy 3:16), through the Person of Jesus Christ (John 14:8-9), and by the gift of the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-20).

The LORD God, Emmanuel, is the One who sent His only begotten Son into the world, to restore and normalize our relationship with Him (and with one another), so that the relationship between God and man would no longer be one-sided, but be one typified by mutual love and faithfulness - between God and man, and the faithfulness and love from man towards the LORD.

This divinely generated relationship of Emmanuel, is described across the totality of the Scriptures, and is something we shall be exploring over the next several weeks. *{This is a short study (I'm not kidding, this is/will be short compared to what it could be) in a single theme along the lines of what is called “biblical theology” meaning, a study of a single theme (and there are many different themes) across the length and breadth of the Bible. This is a different study type/style from “systematic theology” which tries to explain and understand Scripture via the process and structural “system”; understanding it by a sum of Scripture's composite parts. This is also different from a “simple” exegesis (a drawing out of a plain understanding from a single text) interpretation as biblical theology considers a passage in relation to all the rest of the Bible, how this passage connects with others to provide a coherent theme.}*

Today we shall focus on the beginning of God's relationship with us.

“*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth...*” (Genesis 1:1) but even before the beginning, God is. Before the beginning began, the LORD God was already in a relationship together with the three Persons of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost *{the three men I admire most}*. Then, out of the LORD's sovereign will and desire, God created: each Person of the Trinity working together, intending and acting with one another to create in perfect tri-unity.

Why did God choose and will to create? For His own good pleasure (Psalm 51:18, 147:11, 149:4; Luke 12:32; Phil 2:13)

The LORD created us because He wanted to, because it pleased Him. God did not create us just for our own sake, it wasn't all about us. He created us for His own pleasure, from His own desire. He created us so that He might have joy in us (Isaiah 62:5; Matthew 18:12-14).

Why did God choose and will to create? Because He wanted to, He wanted to create people who would be in a personal relationship with Him. The LORD did not create us from any need or lack within Himself. He did not need our human worship and praise. He was not deficient in some regard before creating us. He does not need for us to exist to cater towards His needs and wants, like the deities of other ancient religions were said to need. Yes, He desires our worship and He requires our worship, as an obligation out of our obedience and our reverent devotion, but He does not require it or desire it from His existential need. *{This is part the attribute of God called Aseity.¹}* He alone is deserving of our worship because of Who He is and who we are; our status as creatures and He as our Creator. It is our relative nature within that relationship that requires our obedient worship. God created us so that He would have us to love, and for us enjoy to loving Him. I cannot imagine any better reason for the LORD to perform the miracle of creation, than that: for Him to love and be loved in return.

“*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.*” (Gen. 1:27 ESV) The LORD God made us to be “like” Him; similar, but not the same. We reflect His nature and diverse attributes as His image. As God exists together in relationship within the Trinity, so too His creations reflect this by existing together in our many diverse relationships: person to person, people to the environment, people to animals, animals to the environment, and animals to animals.

One of the first social “laws” which all people come to naturally understand, even if we never verbalize it, is that “like attracts like” *{different from the “law of attraction” which has now taken on a New Age-y “spirituality” concerning one's “energy/vibrations” and the “power of positive thinking” in-part; that positive thoughts attract good things/people while negative thoughts attract the bad}*, like how Cleveland fans gather with other Cleveland fans, and Yankee fans gather together and remain separate from Red Sox fans, or like how some children *{and some adults still}* may separate and organize M&M's, Skittles, or Jelly Beans by their color. Birds of a feather, flock together. Our shared commonality draws us together. The LORD made us each to be “like” Him, to reflect Him, so that we should naturally be attracted towards Him, just as the Persons of the Trinity are drawn together; drawn towards Him in a relational bond of love, because He made us and approaches us, in love.

Then, “*The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.*” (Gen. 2:15 ESV) Just as God worked to make the sun and moon, the air we breathe and the water that we drink, and causes all of the plants to grow, giving us food for nourishment and our continued survival; just as the environment He created supports our lives, so too were people created to “work”, by caring for and tending His great creation as

¹ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/aseity>

His stewards and representatives. We were made to preserve His creation, because He preserves us with it, and by it. God declared His creation to be “Very Good”, so just as He cares for the whole of creation (Psalm 84:3; Matthew 6:26), just as He loves each of His creations, so we too should love His creations, for by living out this love, we express our love for Him.

Our “work” of tending and keeping God's Garden and creation was intended to be a service of love, truly a “labor of love”; service done out of our love for the LORD, in response to His love for us. Even with the curse of the Fall transforming our “work” into “toil” (Genesis 3:17-19), our obligation of loving service to God has not been rescinded; if anything our obligation to serve Him in love has only been intensified, because of the grace and mercy He has shown to disobedient creatures like us.

The Bible does not elaborate on our most ancient forebears and their pre-historic time in the Garden of Eden. We do know that at some time after God created Adam and Eve, after He placed them in Eden, and had given them their important purpose (to work and keep the Garden), and after He had also given them the rule governing their provision (“You may eat from any tree, except for one...”); some time after all of that, they disobeyed the LORD by eating the forbidden fruit, being deceived by that ancient serpent, Satan.

Now the Fall may have happened any time just hours, or days, months or even years after God created Adam and Eve. But, regardless of how long they lived in the Garden, what Scripture makes clear is that from the moment of his formation from the primordial clay, God intended for Adam to be in a close, intimate, and personal relationship with Him. Even while the glory of the LORD fills the heavens and the earth (Numbers 14:21; Isaiah 6:3) such that we are never apart from His presence, many people (if not most) tend to experience their relationship with God as characterized by a sense of “distance”: as in God is or is not around whenever I need/want Him; like He is only around when I come to church on Sunday and pleasantly far the rest of the week; or as some impersonal and abstract concept of a detached divinity: the divine “clock-maker” Who wound everything up, set things in motion and then stepped back to watch things unfold; whether from a lack of revelation: having never heard the message of Christ preached; a lack of understanding: being swayed by the multitude of false religions, or by not being faithfully taught and disciplined in the Way; or by their own intentional and belligerent ignorance: like the so called “atheists” who attack everyone's faith and belief in God, who act hatefully towards Him and all expressions of a sovereign divinity. *{Yet I ask you, how or why can someone hate that which they do not believe exists?}* The simple fact remains, that God only feels to be far away because of our own personal motion away from Him. No matter how far we try and move ourselves away from God, He is right there beside you, through everything. We must draw near to God, as He Himself draws near to us (James 4:8).

Keeping a relationally far distance from the LORD is not how we were created to be, nor was this the type of relationship our first ancestors had with God. What God intended originally, and is restoring us to by the cross and the continuing work of the Holy Spirit, is a personal relationship with Him; because of the Emmanuel promise: that God is with us. This is the divine relationship which every professing Christian claims: to have a personal relationship with Christ.

Regarding this relationship between Adam and Eve living in the Garden of Eden and the LORD who dwells in the heavens (1 Kings 8:22-53; Isaiah 40:22; Revelation 12:12), the Bible and Genesis 3 in particular speaks of God coming down and “visiting” mankind *{See also: Malachi 3:1, 4:5; Luke 19:44; 1 Peter 2:12; for other, less pleasant “visitations”}*. During this particular visit, when Adam and Eve heard the sound of the LORD God “walking in the garden in the cool of the day...”, they tried to hide themselves from His presence. Please note that God did not come into the Garden full of wrath and fury, He walked there during the “cool of the day”, during the most pleasant and peaceful time imaginable. He did not come into the Garden like the rider on the

white horse described in Revelation 19, with “*eyes like blazing fire*”, a “*robe dipped in blood*”, with “*the armies of heaven following*”, and with a sharp sword coming from His mouth (Revelation 19:11-21). No, instead of coming in wrath, He came in peace with the wholeness of *shalom*.

The LORD came to be with those who could not come to Him. He came to them in love, even though they deserved His full wrath. The LORD God came to them. He met them where they were; in their place and in their state, as now fallen humanity. Even now, God comes to us. He comes to meet us where we are, inviting us to return to Him: wherever we are physically, spiritually, or socially. He is Emmanuel; God is with us, even when we are not with God. He comes to us where we are, and He works for our restoration, sending His Holy Spirit to change us, to return us to the original, intended relationship with Him.

Following their transgressions, when God came into the Garden to visit Adam and Eve on that day, He already knew about it. He already knew what they had done. He was not caught off-guard. He was not surprised. Surely He was disappointed, but He was not surprised. Neither was He ignorant of where they were, He knew their location. The only Omniscient, Omnipotent, Omnipresent, Holy, Faithful, and Sovereign One so valued His relationship with His human creations that even after they offended Him, after they had transgressed His Law, after they had disobeyed Him, He still came to meet with sinful man to offer us His grace, mercy, and to give us the promise of a future redemption (Genesis 3:15); the promise of Messiah, the “seed of the woman”, a child who one day would be Himself called, “Emmanuel”, Jesus. **Blessed Be the Name of the LORD!**

When God called out in the Garden, “*Where are you?*”, this was not a rhetorical question, like a parent playing Hide-n-Seek with their child who is seen clearly hiding behind a curtain; nor was it a question deriving from anger, “Where are you? Get out here, now! I'm coming to get you!”. It was a call for their repentance, a call for them to come into His presence to receive forgiveness (Hebrews 4:14-16).

How many of us, as children ourselves, have hidden in fear from the expected wrath and punishment of an aggrieved parent? How many of us have been the aggrieved parent, or other authority, looking for those under our charge, wanting to show them mercy and forgiveness, while still needing to dole out judgment and punishment? If the expression of, “This will hurt me more than it hurts you...” is so very true within our human relationships, then how much more do you think the LORD exercising punishment to Adam and Eve must have hurt Him (Ezekiel 18:23, 32; 33:1; Isaiah 45:22)? So much so, that He turned His face away from His only begotten Son dying as their (and our) punishment, on a Roman cross (Matthew 27:45-46).

Now, the LORD had created mankind with the intention for us to be in a loving relationship with Him, but Man {*capital M, Man*} damaged that relationship, and our forebears knew it. Adam's answer shows us just how bad that damage was. Why did Adam and Eve hide when they heard the sound of the LORD walking in the Garden? Adam answered God saying, “...*I was afraid, because I was naked...*”

There are two words here which we need to closely look at: afraid and naked. There are several layers of meaning within both of those words, especially together in this context for what often seems to be the most simple and obvious understanding to our “modern sensibilities”, is not always the full measure of meaning. Adam and Eve did not hide simply because they had no clothes and were afraid of punishment.

While “naked”, or *'ara* in the Hebrew and *gymnos* in the Greek, does carry the simple connotation of “being without clothes”, it is better understood wholly as “being exposed”. Truly, what naked person is not “exposed”? They are: exposed to view; exposed to the natural elements; exposed to physical dangers; however, the exposure here is not concerning their unclothed state, it is about the exposure of their sin before the LORD's holiness. It is the exposure of their transgressions, and their understanding of the divine requirement that justice must be done.

Having broken God's holy law, Adam and Eve knew what they deserved, on account of what they had done: death; although they probably did not yet understand what “death” was, they quickly began to fear it.

It is evident by their actions as described in Scripture, that they felt a kind of remorse for their actions, for they tried unsuccessfully to cover their exposure (3:7). They felt enough guilt for their sin, that they tried to cover up and hide their shame, before the righteous and holy God. They were not “shameless” as all those who were yet to come, who would revel in their sinful ways, flaunting their sin before the whole wide world. They still “feared” the LORD, clearly still possessing some “wisdom” (Proverbs 9:10), unlike the unrepentant sinners of today, who parade their sins for all to see (Romans 3:18).

Now to “be afraid” or to “fear”, especially in regards to divinity is not just simply “to be frightened”; Adam and Eve did not hide “in fear” because they were frightened or worried about what God would do to them in retribution; this was no horror movie sense of terror. “To fear”, both *yarah* in Hebrew and *phobos* in the Greek are nuanced words, much more than just describing a sheer terror, which is only a part: for example, two thousand years ago, in Judea there were a category of people called “God-fearers”, typically Gentile converts to Judaism, including those who were “almost there” {*having stopped short of surgery*} (Acts 10, 13:26), men like the Roman Centurion Cornelius who summoned Peter to his home in Caesarea, people who truly understood that “*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom...*” (Proverbs 1:7 [knowledge], 9:10). To fear, both *yarah* and *phobos*, also carries a sense of “to revere”, or “to show honor or respect to”, they cause the effect of “glorifying and worshiping” the object of the fear. Like the fear and discomfort we might feel if we arrive “under-dressed” for a party, or if one of the “common-folk” were to meet the Queen of England unprepared. This form of fear is natural and healthy, due to the difference and distance between who they are or represent, and us ordinary folks. Fearing the Creator God as His creation is natural and good because if He created us, then can He not also destroy us like the potter and his clay (Isaiah 29:16; 64:8; Jeremiah 18:4-10; Romans 9:21)?

Adam and Eve hid themselves, not from fear of God's wrath but out of respect and love of Him within their existing relationship. Their fear was not a conscious choice or a reaction to being caught in sin, but it was a natural response to the change in their relational status with the LORD: formerly holy, now unholy. The response was driven by their shame and regret for what they had done and could not undo. It was a response driven by their knowledge, their limited human understanding, of the offense they had caused against their Creator; the little child who breaks a plate feels this, and often responds in kind; this is a response of shame.

Adam and Eve heard the sound of the LORD walking in the Garden, they heard Him coming to visit creations with whom He had an intimate relationship, and they tried to hide from Him. They hid, not like Bilbo Baggins hiding to avoid his cousins, the Sackville-Baggins whom he disliked, but hiding like a child caught reading by flashlight, after “Lights Out”: a guilty and shame-filled hiding, because of the disappointment they have caused. They hid like a puppy, who has done something naughty, will hide; with his head down and tail between his legs, yet who will still come out, slowly, when called. They hid out of their reverence for God, for His holiness; they hid because they understood how offensive their sinful disobedience was to Him. They tried to remove themselves from God's presence in their shame, to be respectful of the LORD, not wanting to cause Him further offense as the prophet Habbakuk says of God, “*Your eyes are too pure to look on evil...*” (1:13a).

Our forebears were not shameless, they were shame-filled, and respected their relational LORD enough to choose “to try” and not compound their offenses. We would do so well as to recognize and be cognizant of our own shame. As offended, aggrieved, and disappointed as the LORD surely was, He still came to see them. He came to be with them although they had sinned, and He still comes to sinful people like us.

“For one will scarcely die for a righteous person-- though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die-- but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Rom. 5:7-8 ESV)

The LORD is Holy and Just, so He could not just forgive Adam and Eve with a wave of His “spiritual hand”. They had broken His Law, and they knew the consequence for that violation. The LORD would have been Unjust if there had been no punishment, for then He would have violated His own Righteousness. He showed them grace and mercy by sending them into exile; since by sinning, they chose to move themselves away from their relationship with God, He graciously let them go, yet He still remains there, right beside us always near to hand.

Furthermore, God showed them grace by clothing them with animal skins, *“The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.”* (Genesis 3:21) Those skins came from the first sacrifice, made to be a covering for mankind's sin. Adam and Eve's continued lives were paid for by the blood of an innocent, Leviticus 17:11 tells us *“For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life.”* Death paid for their lives.

The damage done to our relationship with the LORD is a case of our own self-harm, yet the LORD is still faithful even when we are not. He is the One who initiated the relationship, and being the One aggrieved He is the only One who could restore it too. Adam's first sin and our resultant sinfulness moves us ever away from God and His loving presence, but our Emmanuel will never abandon us. The LORD has promised to be with us always saying, *“And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”* (Matt. 28:20 ESV)

Now that animal sacrifice, the life taken for Adam and Eve's atonement, was only a partial-restoration of the relationship between man and God, because animal blood and skins could not remove or fully cover the stain of their sin; their sin still “shines” through (Hebrews 10:4); so they still could not remain in the LORD's direct presence – hence their exile. This sacrifice, like all others under the old covenant system, points towards the true sacrifice which satisfied divine justice and enabled God's grace to be given to sinful people, like me and you. The language used of “atonement” is such that the blood served as a “covering” for sin (Psalm 32:1; Revelation 7:14). Only the blood of Christ is so opaque that our sins cannot be seen any longer; that covered by His blood, only Jesus Christ is seen by the Father standing in our place. The Garden sacrifice points to the death of the innocent Christ on the cross, the Righteous One who was numbered among the wicked, so that the elect could be accounted as righteous. We are restored and reunited into a right relationship with the LORD, in Him.

It does not seem strange to me that many people feel the most closely connected to God when they spend time in nature, whether it be in the wild, or in a beautifully manicured garden. God originally placed His people in a Garden and He came to meet with them there. Perhaps it is because in times and places like that, when we are in nature, we reach the closest point of our lives, to being like that original time in the Garden; where all of the worldly things, and corruptions, and distractions were absent. Perhaps that is why we can more easily see and feel the LORD's presence around us there? The LORD's presence fills the earth, thus He is always with us and surrounding us, all distance apart from God is our own self-delusion.

Emmanuel. God is with us, always and in every where and every when. He has come to meet with you, would you go to meet with Him? He is here, when and where you need Him to be, because He loves you and wants you to grow more deeply in your relationship with Him.

Emmanuel. God is with us. So, let us be with God too.

AMEN