

Immanuel: The Good News of Christmas



By Pastor Ivan Leung

In the highly commercialized and secularized society of today, Jesus, the main character of Christmas, has been replaced by Santa Claus, shopping, entertainment, partying and travelling. If we celebrate Christmas without the concept of Jesus, the real meaning of Christmas will be lost! The Bible clearly reveals the Good News as reported by the shepherds long time ago. "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger" (Luke 2:11-12).

Christmas is the celebration of the birth of Lord Jesus - Immanuel, Lord Jesus Incarnate, full of grace and truth, who dwells within us and changes our lives. The very unique life of Jesus truly impacts our lives. As this busy Christmas season is approaching, let us focus again on Jesus, follow the life example of Him and experience the joyful message of Immanuel.

Humility Instead of Boasting

The average individuals like to boast about their achievements, beauty,

wisdom, ability, prestige, status, houses, cars or other possessions they own. Our Lord Jesus was entirely different; He didn't have a boastful heart. He said, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:29). Only with a gentle and humble heart can we enjoy peace; a boastful heart is deprived of peace. When we try to compare ourselves with others, we can never enjoy peace, because there is bound to be someone more superior to us.

Our Lord Jesus Christ's life is truly humble, as demonstrated in Philippians 2:6-8 "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death even death on a cross!" The core meaning of this scripture is "humbled himself" (verse 8). Paul emphasized that Jesus' humility was founded upon a willing heart. Because of His love for us, Jesus willingly humbled himself to take human form. This is a wonderful event in history.

Giving Instead of Receiving

"After this, his brother came out, with his hand grasping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when Rebekah gave birth to them" (Genesis 25:26). Jacob's life personified constant grasping: grasping for birth order, deceiving to be firstborn and stealing his father's blessing. Jacob had been grasping

various things and titles until he finally grasped God Himself.

Jesus' life is a complete antithesis of that. He stressed, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). The life of a person who is willing to give is more abundant. "I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds" (John 12:24). Jesus taught us that He Himself was the single kernel of wheat, who shed His blood and gave up His life to complete our redemption. As a result, many seeds have been produced to prepare for blessed and abundant lives.

Jesus says that it is more blessed to give than to receive. Our lives do not depend on how much we own, but rather on how much we give. As one's life comes to an end, one needs to ask:

- ▶ How much have I served, instead of how much have I enjoyed my possessions?
- ▶ How much have I sacrificed, instead of how much have I achieved?
- ▶ How many people have I helped, instead of how much pleasure I have received?
- ▶ How often have I served out of love, instead of how many of my ambitions have been fulfilled?

Serving Instead of Leading

Most people enjoy leadership, power and control, but our Lord Jesus' life and teachings demonstrated other-

wise. "Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:42-45).

Jesus pointed out the normal fact that the higher the position one had, the more authority he would own and the more people would be under him. However, His teaching to His disciples was contrary to the norm: they needed to learn to be humble servants; for, "whoever wants to be first must be slave of all." Jesus teaches us that a great man should indeed be a humble servant, willing to serve others in humility.

Jesus did not talk the talk, but He literally walked the revolutionary walk. "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Jesus humbled Himself by washing the feet of the disciples. For our sins, He gave up His life, to be nailed on the cross. What an example of total sacrifice and service.

Therefore, the Lord Jesus is not only a great Saviour, He is our Redeemer who brings mankind true love and hope. In an era full of power struggles, Jesus is an icon of **True Servanthood**.

Acceptance Instead of Criticism

Jesus never loses sight of people, regardless of their status or identity. He always values the individual and cares about his/her needs. How Jesus accepted and cared for Zacchaeus is a good example in



Matthew 1:23: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" - which means, "God with us."



Luke 19:1-7. Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector and a wealthy loner, so no one chose to be his acquaintance. Jesus penetrated into his lonely heart and identified his needs. When Jesus decided to stay in his house, Zacchaeus was thrilled because he realized he had never been accepted by anyone except Jesus. While all despised and avoided him, Jesus accepted and connected with him on a personal level. Jesus understood the needs of the lonely heart: the perpetually isolated soul crying out for love and acceptance.

All the lonely hearts, suffering souls and impoverished spirits need God's recognition, acceptance and love to enjoy renewed lives.

Love Instead of Hate

It is common for people to hold grudges even for decades, but Jesus was different. In Him, there was no vengeance but forgiveness. "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). When the soldiers drew lots for Jesus' clothing, He uttered the famous seven sayings on the cross, the first being forgiveness of the Roman soldiers. That prayer was uttered during a time of extreme spiritual and physical torment, and that prayer symbolized the incredibly forgiving love of Jesus. What a different life!

The Bible emphasizes that loving one another is evident when we know God. "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.

Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love" (I John 4:7-8). The aged disciple John had a deeper knowledge of God's love. He understood that whoever knew God would love others. God's character is love, so when we truly love, we are experiencing the true nature of God and establishing a closer relationship with Him. John also stressed that it was impossible to have understood the source of love, yet failed to exemplify love to others. "Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him" (I John 4:16).

Jesus' Life as Our Example

As Christmas is drawing near, we need to remember our Lord Jesus Christ. And because of His life our lives can be different; a stressful life can transform to a peaceful one; a worrisome life can find happiness; an empty life can be filled with abundance - **only if** we are willing to follow Jesus' unique example and seize this opportunity to share Immanuel - the good news of Christmas with others.

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests." (Luke 2:14)