

God with Us Part 2

One of the Great Themes of Scripture Meant to Be a Reality in Our Lives

Thesis: Let's talk about the miracle of Christmas: God with us, which is one of the major themes of Scripture (Matthew 1:18-25). And, it is meant to be a reality in our lives (John 15:5).

Text: Matthew 1:18-25; John 1:1-11

God with Us Part 1: a review

Today, let's talk about the miracle of Christmas: God with us, which is one of the major themes of Scripture (Matthew 1:18-25). And, it is meant to be a reality in our lives (John 15:5).

The miracle of Christmas: God with us

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. 19 Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. 20 But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 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." 22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 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." 24 When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. 25 But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus (Matthew 1:18-25).

Matthew 1:20-23 (NIV84), a review

1. 20 But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 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."
 - a. The Scripture doesn't explain the mystery of the birth of Christ, only that "what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit."

- b. Mary, the fully human woman, will give birth to a son.
 - c. His name is to be Jesus, which means, "Yahweh saves."
 - d. Jesus, the fully human and fully divine one, will save us from our sins, which reverses the fall of Genesis 3.
2. *22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet:*
- a. In his Gospel, which was written to a Jewish audience, Matthew emphasizes the prophetic words and OT promises of God which are fulfilled in Jesus.
 - b. God gives his word, keeps his word, and fulfills his word.
3. *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."*
- a. Matthew is quoting Isaiah 7:14. As Pastor Steve has told us, Scripture has partial fulfillments in its time, fulfillment in Jesus, fulfillment in the church, and ultimately eschatological fulfillment when Jesus returns.
 - b. In the Garden, God walked with us (Genesis 2-3).
 - c. In Revelation 21, God puts heaven and earth together.
 - i. *And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God (Revelation 21:3).*
 - d. And this theme of "God with us" is throughout the Bible.
 - e. Jesus comes so that we can enter into the eternal fellowship to which we were called and destined as followers of the Lord and members of God's family.

Point: The miracle of Christmas is Immanuel, God with us. God sent his Son, Jesus, so that we might have a way into his eternal family. What Jesus came to do at Christmas-- to reveal God to us and to save us from our sins-- is not meant to be a story told once a year. Rather, God with us is an invitation to know God, to live with God, and to experience the reality of God in and through us. **Is your life a reality of God with you?**

God with Us Part 2

The miracle of knowing Jesus: Union with God.

God with us is supposed lead to a personal relationship with God, that then leads to an intimate relationship with God, and which finally leads us into an organic (natural) relationship with God through Jesus.

My focus is on John 15:4-5, but I wanted to read these verses in their context of John 15:1-11.

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. 2 Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. 3 Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. 4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. 5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. 7 If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. 9 As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. 10 If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. 11 These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full (John 15:1-11 ESV).

John 15:1–11 (ESV)

1. *1 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. 2 Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.*
 - a. Throughout the OT, Israel is thought of as the vine.
 - b. In the Old Testament the vine is frequently used as a symbol for Israel (e.g., Ps 80:8–9; Isa 27:2–6; Hos 10:1; etc.). Yet it is usually employed as a symbol of a disobedient Israel (Ezek 17:6–10) that has become wild (Jer 2:21) and dried up. It will therefore be burned with fire (Ezek 15:1–8; 19:10–14) because it is ripe for judgment (Isa 5:1–7). In the Old Testament texts, therefore, if Israel is the vine or the vineyard, then the Lord God is viewed as the vinedresser or gardener (cf. Isa 27:2–6). But what is totally different in the Johannine mashal [an extended metaphor] is the role of Jesus and the disciples. In this metaphorical

description the Father is still portrayed as the gardener, but Jesus is the Vine, not Israel, and the disciples, the followers of the way of God, are pictured as branches. It is as though there has been an insertion into the old image that changes it radically. The “vine” in this mashal is hardly in any danger of judgment as in the Old Testament texts. That possible scenario is ascribed only to the branches. Jesus, the Vine, appears to stand between the vineyard keeper/gardener and the branches as a kind of “mediator” of life and sustenance. (Gerald L. Borchert, John 12–21, vol. 25B, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002), 139.)

- c. ... **the key to interpreting this [passage] does not lie so much in the question of status as it does in the issue of fruitfulness.** The [extended metaphor] here sets the fruitfulness of Christians as a test of belonging in the Vine. It is very likely that in the Johannine churches there were a number of people who were identified as Christians but who were not bearing fruit. The problem has only escalated in the years since that time. (Gerald L. Borchert, John 12–21, vol. 25B, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002), 140.)
- d. What is fruitfulness?
 - i. Accordingly, **the “true” Vine**, who is pictured here as **steadfast and authentic**, **expects his followers to be truly fruitful in communicating the authentic message and life to the inauthentic and hostile world.** (Gerald L. Borchert, John 12–21, vol. 25B, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002), 141.)
2. *3 Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.*
 - a. John here is talking about the true branches, the authentic followers of Jesus, not the branches that have been discarded.
3. *4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.*
 - a. **Abide is an experiential word.** It is not simply doing one’s duty, fulfilling a set of requirements, or checking off a list of spiritual practices.
 - b. Abide in me and I in you—this is talking about mutual indwelling.
 - c. **Personal to intimate to organic.** When we come to Christ, it is through a personal relationship with the Living God. Then, we move into an intimate relationship, where we learn to live authentically with the Lord as he shares his life with us. Finally, we come to an organic relationship, which is mutuality or shared life. **Prayer for instance is no longer a duty or task or assignment; rather, our life becomes a prayer or prayer is our life.**
4. *5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.*

- a. For the branches, life is in the vine. Disconnected from the vine, there is no life for the branches.
 - b. We often focus on the individual branch. But verse 5 also talks about the plurality of the branches. If one thinks that one can live an isolated Christian life, then, one is deceived. Where does one see a vine with one branch? The life of the vine is in the fruitfulness of the “community” of the branches.
 - c. The branches bear the fruit of the life of vine. Our lives are to bear the fruit of Christlikeness to our neighbors, co-workers, and friends.
 - d. Our fruitfulness, therefore, will embrace and express:
 - i. Who Jesus is.
 - ii. What Jesus says and does.
 - iii. What the works of Jesus are.
 - iv. What the burdens and desires of Jesus are.
 - v. What God said he would do in our lives to form us into the image of his Son, Jesus. What Christlikeness looks like to God.
5. *6 If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.*
- a. The warning about unfruitfulness is clear. Fruitfulness is a natural by-product of abiding in the vine, Jesus.
 - b. I believe the Father as the vinedresser will cut off the branch that is already dead (unfruitful, un-Christlike, separated from the branches).
 - c. **The passage calls us to turn our lives around, to repent, and to walk according to the will of God, not just our own best thoughts and efforts. And, praise God, we have the abiding presence of the Spirit of God helping us, indwelling us, and empowering us to say “no” to sin and to say “yes” to God and godliness.**
6. *7 If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.*
- a. There is a direct connection between how one prays and the primary commitments of one’s life. Jesus, in this core [extended metaphor], demands that the fundamental commitment of a disciple’s life is abiding in him. That means that the model of Jesus in life and word must permeate the life and words of the disciple. When this happens, praying ceases to be selfish asking and becomes aligned with the will and purposes of God in Christ. (Gerald L. Borchert, John 12–21, vol. 25B, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002), 145.)
7. *8 By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.*
- a. It is because they abide in Jesus, the Vine, and are obedient to him in the bearing of fruit that they bring glory to the Father.... The primary

task of the disciple is to glorify Jesus (cf. 17:10; 21:19), who glorifies the Father. This bearing of fruit, therefore, not only indicates that the followers are true disciples (*mathētai*) of Jesus but also that God is glorified in their discipleship. (Gerald L. Borchert, *John 12–21*, vol. 25B, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002), 146.)

8. *9 As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.*
 - a. In this verse the focus turns again so that the theme of abiding merges into the crucial Johannine theme of love. Here some of the elements of **the circle of love** are enunciated. They are as follows: the Father loves the Son (cf. 3:35; 17:23), and the Son obediently loves the Father (cf. 10:17; 14:31); the Son loves his followers, and they are to love and obey him (cf. 13:34; 14:15, 23); loving and obeying the Son means being loved by the Father (cf. 14:21, 23; 17:23); being loved by the Son also implies loving one another (cf. 13:34; 15:12, 17); God not only loves the disciples but loves the world and gave his Son for its people (cf. 3:16); but many in the world love darkness and do not do the will of God (cf. 3:19; 14:24). **In his first epistle John carries the theme of love further and insists that the disciple must not love in words only but in actual deeds of love (cf. 1 John 3:18) and that hating one's brother is actually an indication of not loving God (cf. 3:15) because love is the sign of knowing God (cf. 4:7).**
 - b. Bearing fruit therefore means loving others as God loves them and giving witness to the world. Such fruit bearing is possible only by abiding in Jesus, the Vine. (Gerald L. Borchert, *John 12–21*, vol. 25B, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002), 146.)
9. *10 If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.*
 - a. In 14:15 it was said that loving Jesus would result in obeying or keeping (*tērēsete*) his commands (*entolas*, cf. 14:21; and “word,” *logos*, 14:23). But in the present text the order is completely reversed. Accordingly, here obeying/keeping his commands results in abiding in Jesus' love. The only natural conclusion from these virtually reversible statements, therefore, is that they are so interrelated and inseparable that you cannot have one without the other. Moreover, once again the relationship of the disciple to Jesus in terms of obedience and love is modeled on the relationship of the Son to the Father. (Gerald L. Borchert, *John 12–21*, vol. 25B, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002), 146.)
10. *11 These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.”*

- a. Why did Jesus share these things about the vine, the vinedresser, the branch, abiding in the vine, and fruitfulness with us? Because he wants his joy to be in us and that our joy may be full.
- b. Obedience, love, fruit bearing, being pruned could all be viewed as rather painful and demanding ideas that scarcely suggest excitement or desirability.... The purpose of abiding in the vine is to provide the sense of delight to those who are authentic disciples of Jesus, even though they may face pain or persecution. (Gerald L. Borchert, John 12–21, vol. 25B, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002), 147.)

The miracle of knowing Jesus: union with God.

God with us is supposed lead to a personal relationship with God, that then leads to an intimate relationship with God, and which finally leads us into an organic (natural) relationship with God through Jesus.

In John 15:1-11, the Lord Jesus challenges us with the reality of the life we are to experience in God, from abiding in the vine to bearing fruit to God's glory to abiding in God's love to experiencing the joy of the Lord.

The message of Christmas is meant to be more than a story told once a year, but a deep reality of abiding in, abounding in, and experiencing the life of God in and through our lives.

I invite you into this eternal story this Christmas Season through Jesus the Messiah.