

## Jesus' Other Name

*Matthew 1:18-25*

**D**o you recognize these names: Nathan Birnbaum, Francis Octavia Smith or Archibald Leach? Those are the birth names of George Burns, Dale Evans and Cary Grant, who changed their names at some point in their lives for one reason or another. Other examples are President Gerald Ford (Leslie Lynch King, Jr.), singer/songwriter John Denver (Henry John Deutschendorf, Jr.), actor Danny Thomas (Amos Jacobs), and actor John Wayne (Marion Michael Morrison). (*The Best Baby Name Book in the Whole Wide World*, Bruce and Vicki Lansky. Meadowbrook Press, Deephaven, MN 1981, pp. 24-27)

The Lord Jesus Christ had another name, too, but it wasn't one given to Him because the name "Jesus" was unsatisfactory. It was given to Him because of the added significance it would carry. That other Name was "Emmanuel" which is Hebrew for "God with us."

There have been times in my life, as there have been in yours, when I found myself saying gratefully to some real friend, "I don't know what I would have done if you had not been there." Just a few seconds' reflection will bring to your memory the name of a person who was there when you needed him or her the most. If the presence of a human friend can mean so much to us, how much more should the presence of the Lord mean to us?

Matthew had written only 23 verses of his Gospel, when he made a beautiful statement, the truth of which echoes and rings and resounds through the pages of the Word of God. That beautiful statement is this: "*They shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us*" (Matthew 1:23).

Imagine that! The same God Who created the heavens and the earth with a word; the same God Who is eternal, exalted and holy; the same God Who is the Most High, All-Powerful, All-Present, and All-Knowing—*this* God is the One Who is *with us*, as weak and unfaithful and sinful as we are.

The name "Emmanuel" proclaims that in Jesus, God dwells among us. When Matthew began his story of the birth of Christ, he placed all the emphasis on the fact that Jesus was "*conceived...of the Holy Spirit.*" Sure, he mentions other things, such as the genealogy, the undeniable fact of the Virgin Birth, the predicament Joseph found himself in, and that an angel of the Lord spoke to Joseph in a dream. But the emphasis is on the fact that Jesus is divine—that He was born of a woman, yet truly God.

So to emphasize this truth more fully, Matthew quotes from Isaiah 7:14 when he says, “*Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name, Emmanuel.*” Matthew is saying, “Make no mistake about it: God Himself is uniquely present in Jesus Christ as He has never been before. Through Jesus, God Himself is with us!”

This is a truth that we celebrate every year at Christmas. God became one of us! But today I invite you to think about the day after Christmas, when the wrapping paper is in the garbage can and the family has gone home. And I ask you to consider the remarkable, exciting, marvelous, beautiful truth that God is with us even then! We don’t have to go very far before we find that the Scripture has a tremendous amount to say about the fact that God is with us.

## **1 God is with us in trouble**

We’re talking about all kinds of trouble. God is with us in trouble that comes unexpectedly, or trouble that we cause ourselves. Early in His relationship with the people of Israel, God gave them blessed assurance that He would be with them, even when the odds were against them. He told them in Deuteronomy 20: “*When you go forth to war against your enemies, and see horses and chariots and an army larger than your own (which sounds like trouble to me!) you shall not be afraid of them; for the Lord your God is with you*”(v. 1).

And this is something God has told His people over and over again. David wrote, “*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble*” (Psalm 46:1). In your trouble, in my trouble, God is a very present help! The help can’t get much better than that. You can’t get any nearer than “very present.”

But it doesn’t stop there. God spoke through Isaiah (43:2) and said, “*When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire, you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.*” When you and I get into trouble, very few words of advice will solve every bit of that trouble. When we are backed into a corner with no place to turn, how beautiful and refreshing to our spirits it is to know that God is with us—even in trouble. Even in trouble that we have caused ourselves!

You may not be in trouble this Christmas, but next June or August or October, when trouble strikes you down and threatens to snuff out your life, even then, you and I can know that God is with us.

## **2 God is with us in loneliness**

No one is exempt from loneliness all the time. Now there is a big difference between solitude and loneliness, but every one of us at one time or another can be overwhelmed

by a distressing, helpless sense of loneliness. But God's Word has a lot to say about loneliness, too, and about how God is with us even then.

Hebrews 13:5, for example, reads, "*Be content with such things as you have; for He has said, 'I will never leave you, nor forsake you.'*" What a joy it is for me as a Christian to cast myself into the arms of my Father, because I know that God is with me through His Son Jesus Christ, Emmanuel. What a joy it is for me to know that God will never, never, never, NEVER leave me—that He will never, never, never, NEVER forsake me!

But there are times when the loneliness just won't go away, when it crushes in on your spirit and stifles you. You may be surrounded by loving friends and caring family, but loneliness still comes. And you start to worry about something you did or said in the past, or something you should have done or said, and the loneliness just gets worse and worse. At such times it is a comfort to know that God is with us in loneliness, that He doesn't leave us just because we are feeling lonely or sorry for ourselves. "*The Lord is my shepherd,*" the psalmist wrote, and Jesus implied that He, as the Good Shepherd, would never leave His sheep. David wrote in another place in the Psalms (34:18), "*The Lord is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit.*"

Loneliness can strike at anytime, anywhere. Three men were on a fishing trip when their boat was wrecked in a storm. They managed to swim to a desert island. For a few days all was well. But after a week, one of three, a cattle baron became despondent; he missed his ranch. A second longed for his native Manhattan, where he was a cab driver, but the third man, a happy-go-lucky type, was thoroughly enjoying himself.

One day as the rancher walked along the beach with the others, he found an ancient lamp. When he rubbed it, out jumped a genie. "For freeing me from my prison," said the genie, "each of you shall receive one wish."

The cattle baron said, "I wish I could be back on my ranch." POOF! He was gone. The cab driver said, "I wish I could be back in Manhattan driving my cab again." POOF! He was gone. The genie turned to the third man, and asked, "And what is your wish?" "Well," he said, as he looked around. "I'm kinda lonely with the other guys gone. I wish they were back here with me." POOF! POOF! They were back!

Loneliness cannot be solved that easily. There are times when we all wish we could rub a magic lamp and receive all the wishes we desired, but it doesn't work that way in reality. But we do take different approaches to solving our loneliness. I saw a cartoon once in which a man with a gun was pointing it at the chest of another man whose arms were raised. The man with the gun is saying, "This is not a holdup. I just want to TALK to somebody."

But Jesus took another approach to loneliness. Once Jesus was facing the loneliest time in His life, just before He was arrested and crucified. He told His disciples: *“The hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, every man to his own home, and will leave me alone; yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me”* (John 16:32). The comfort you and I can draw from knowing that God is with us—even in our loneliness—is unlimited. God is with us in loneliness.

### **3 God is with us in bereavement**

You may not be grieving over the loss of a loved one today, but you might be tomorrow. Your loss may have even occurred years ago, but the pain of that loss is still fresh. None of us knows for certain whether or not tomorrow will bring sorrow and the pain of bereavement. And probably every one of us has known that pain in the past, and even now it seems that a piece of our lives is missing, that something has been wrenched from our hearts, and the wound just hasn't healed over yet.

There are so many things that can remind us of a deceased loved one: a song, a chair, an expression, a holiday or a birthday. But we have the blessed comfort of the Word of God to sustain us and carry us through. The world just cannot match the comfort that God gives us in times of bereavement. Friends might crowd around and offer their condolences and solace, but they can never match that of Jesus, Emmanuel! How grateful we are for friends who care enough to be there when we are hurting and grieving, but how much more we hurt when they go home!

Jesus never “goes home.” He stays right there with us through all the hurt and pain and grief, and He is still there a month or a year or a decade later when an old emotional scar is ripped open. “My Lord is near me all the time,” we sing in one of our hymns, and how true that is. How very true that is!

Once again, we find comfort in turning to the Word of God: *“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are called according to His purpose”* (Romans 8:28). *“Peace I leave with you,”* Jesus said to His disciples just before their own time of bereavement when He died. *“My peace I give to you: but not as the world gives. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid”* (John 14:27). And He told them earlier in that same chapter of John, *“I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.”* I am Emmanuel! I will be with you, even in bereavement, however long the bereavement lasts.

## 4 God is with us even in death

If you thought a moment ago that you have escaped loneliness and bereavement, then you can know that unless the Lord Jesus returns before that time, you will die. An ancient saying states that “Death is a black camel, which kneels at the gates of all.” The writer of Ecclesiastes proclaimed sadly that he had looked at the wise and the foolish and “*one event happens to them all,*” speaking of death (2:14). Isaiah said, “*We all do fade as a leaf*” (64:6). None of us can escape death.

When author William Saroyan died in May of 1981, he had fought cancer for two years. Five days before he was hospitalized for the last time, he telephoned the Associated Press to report that cancer had spread to several of his vital organs. He then gave this final statement to be read after his death: “Everybody has got to die, but I have always believed an exception would be made in my case. Now what?” (*Reader’s Digest*, December 1981).

But he discovered that there wasn’t an exception made in his case, nor will there be for us. And none of us knows exactly when that time will come when we slip on to the other side of eternity. No exceptions. We don’t know when that time will be, but for those of us who know Christ, we have the assurance that God is with us through His Son Jesus Christ, Emmanuel, even then.

That is why Paul could triumphantly exclaim, “*For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain...My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better*” (Philippians 1:21, 23). He was not suicidal—he just had his eyes and his heart fixed on Jesus, because Paul knew that he belonged to Christ, and he simply wanted to be with Christ.

Jesus’ other name is Emmanuel—God with us—and He certainly is with us in death.

The Office of the Medical Examiner in Cook County, Illinois, maintains a website with a listing of the people whose bodies have gone unclaimed by family or friends. There is even a list of those who are unidentified—they have died, but no one knows who they are. As Christians, we do not have to worry about our spirits being unclaimed after death, for Jesus has given us this sure promise: “*I go to prepare a place for you, and ...I will come again, and receive you to myself; that where I am, there you may be also*” (John 14:2-3).

Gordon MacDonald is a popular author and speaker. Once after he had delivered a lecture, a Nigerian woman approached him. She was a physician on the staff of a large American teaching hospital. She introduced herself with a familiar American name. Gordon asked her, “What is your African name?” She gave him the name, but it was very difficult for American tongues to pronounce. Gordon asked her, “What does it mean?”

She explained that her name means “Child Who Takes the Anger Away.” Then she told her story. “My parents had been forbidden by their parents to marry. But they loved each other so much that they defied the family opinions and married anyway. For several years they were ostracized from both their families. Then my mother became pregnant with me. And when the grandparents held me in their arms for the first time, the walls of hostility came down. I became the one who swept the anger away. And that’s the name my mother and father gave to me.” (Leith Anderson, [www.wooddale.org/faith\\_matters](http://www.wooddale.org/faith_matters))

That’s what we can say about Jesus—He swept the anger away, by bringing God down to mankind. Jesus’ other name is Emmanuel—God with us! That is a joy so rich in meaning and blessing and implication. For those of us who are Christians, we have the wonderful assurance that God is with us through His Son Jesus Christ—in trouble, loneliness, bereavement and in death, and in a host of other situations in which we may find ourselves: temptation, sin, confusion. Jesus is with us in salvation, prayer and in our witnessing for Him.

But for those who are not certain about their soul’s salvation, the Bible has a word for you, too, and it is a word of hope and pardon and forgiveness: “*Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me*” (Revelation 3:20).

Deep down in your heart, where it really counts, do you know Jesus’ other name?