

“Family Experiencing the God Who is Present”, Michael Gatlin, John 2:23 - 3:16 & Isaiah 7:14, December 13, 2015

This advent season we are continuing a series of message where we are going to look at one of the names given to Jesus long before he was born by a prophet named Isaiah, and that name is Immanuel. In the bible in the book of Isaiah chapter 7:14 says, therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. And you may already know that Immanuel just simply means God with us. That God is with us, that his presence is here, that we get to experience him! If you take a look at the entirety of the scripture, the old and the New Testament and one of the things you will notice as you look through it with the lens of that God had always wanted to be with his people. In fact that is like the whole deal God wanting to be with his people. This all starts back in the original garden where Adam and Eve are walking in the garden in the cool of the day with the Lord that's in Genesis chapter two. I wonder what that would have been like, walking with God in the original garden. The garden was actually a place where God lived, the holy of holies if you will. And we find that God then appears to the patriarchs over and over again personally and in dreams. He appears to Moses and as Moses is leading the children of Israel out of Egypt one of the things we see is God instructs him to set up this tent right in the middle of camp. And this tent is known as this tent of meeting where Moses would go to meet with God. And when Moses needed to meet with God he would go into the tent and then this pillar of a cloud that would signify God's presence and it would descend on the tent and they would know that Moses was meeting with God there because that's where his presence was, it was with his people. And he traveled with them as they wandered for forty years in the wilderness. And after they land in what's known as Israel their own country then one of the things they eventually do when they land is build a temple and in the middle of that temple is this place that is called the holy of holies where the ark of the covenant was and that was the place where God lived.

And so it's no mistake that the apostle John that we looked at last week in verse fourteen of the first chapter of his gospel where he talks about the word became flesh and that God actually became a human. In the original language it says that he tabernacle amongst us. He put his tent right there in the middle of where we are at and that we actually get to see God's presence in Jesus, it's this whole story of God being with his people. And in Acts chapter two it talks about how the Holy Spirit presence is with the church. And you find that when you read through the book of Acts that the main player isn't the apostles, but it is the Holy Spirit. Over and over again that the Holy Spirit led them to do this or that the Holy Spirit directed this. That God is in the presence of his church, of his community. And if you skip to the very end of the book of Revelation and you get to the last few chapters like 20, 21 and 22 you see that God's presence fills all of heaven and earth, that the whole thing has always been about Immanuel about God who is with us. God wants to be with his people. You might already realize this already but the presence of God in our lives is an incredibly comforting and an incredible challenging thing all at the same time. Like when the stuff in your life that is not supposed to hit the fan, hits the fan it's like one of the things we do is we cry out for God's presence, it's like God will you help me, will you show up here. It's like we long for God's presence in those kinds of moments. But when everything is going the way we want it to go and we don't want God going and sticking his nose in our business well then God's presence it kind of challenging because he addresses things like our sexuality or our use of money, our conversations or the way we treat one another. He addresses the way we perceive one another and it challenges us very deeply. And so what we have been doing and what we will be doing today is we will be looking at the gospel of John and how real life people experience God's presence as both a comfort and a challenge. I love the way C.S Lewis says it. He says that God is the transcendental interferer. That he is always sticking his nose in our business in ways that doesn't always rub us the right way. We see that in the gospels over and over again.

Grab a bible and turn to John chapter two verse twenty three reading through chapter three which has one of the most famous verses that everybody like the rainbow haired guy we have all seen at sporting events with the sign that reads John 3:16. I was watching one of my favorite guilty pleasure MMA fighting last night and after one of the fights there was blood all over the ring it is just one of those things after a long day of doing pasturing stuff and be around people it's just fun watching people get knock around real hard. I know I am sorry I need prayer, well now you know what you can be praying for me for, compassion

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right? I need prayer on a regular basis about this. Anyway, at the end of one of the fights one of the guys gets this really cool seventies white sweat bands that had John 3:16 embroidered on them, which I thought they were really cool. That is the verse that so many of us use, but what I want to do is put this verse in context. So here we go John chapter two verse twenty three, but first lets pray and then we will get started.

Heavenly Father, thank you. We thank you for the way that you love us enough to bring comfort and challenge. And Lord some amongst us today who are in this room need your comfort. We need your comfort because of a passing of a loved one and just the way that this season can dial that up for us. Maybe there is something going on relationally or medically or whatever it is Lord. There are some of us in this room right now that really need your comfort and I would ask that you would draw close today. Would you meet us right where we are at. And then Lord I would dare say that we would probably all need your challenge. And so Father I would ask that you give every single one of us something to think about, something that would really draws us closer to you. That allows us to experience your presence in a much deeper way. And so we invite you to come. Holy Spirit, Christ said that you would be our teacher and that you would lead us into truth so would you come and do that this morning. It is in Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Alright, John chapter two starting in verse twenty three it reads. V23 Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name. V24 But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. V25 He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man. Chapter 3 V1 Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. V2 He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous sign you are doing if God were not with him. V3 In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." This man named Nicodemus is kind of in this fork in the road. You know we can miss out on the presence of God. We can experience his presence or we can actually miss out on this whole thing. And Nicodemus is kind of at this fork in the road where he is coming and he is asking for more of God's presence. And Jesus kind of creates this fork in the road and there are several things that stand out even that part we just read. There are several reasons that you and I can miss out on God's presence in our lives. I just want to unpack those for a couple of seconds.

First of all we can miss out on God's presence because of just a shallow faith, verse twenty three says many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name. And that is cool, but some people only believe in Jesus because of the signs he performs they only believe because of the cool stuff that he does. For some of us that's the depth of our faith and it is a small faith and it is a shallow faith. Their faith only goes so far or maybe some people saw some of the healings that had taken place. Or maybe some people actually attended or heard about the really cool wedding where they ran out of wine and then Jesus take about hundred and forty gallons of water and turns that into one of the best wine they have had all day. And people are thinking I want to party with that guy, like that's where I want to be hanging out wherever that guy is that's where I want to be, well that's a shallow faith. In fact Jesus actually came up with a little nickname for his disciple which you don't find it here, but you can find it in other parts of the gospels where he says "you of little faith". It is like we don't find that phrase he used anywhere else in ancient literature you of little faith or you of tiny faith. And it's this picture he used as this faith that doesn't cover your whole life. Have you ever gone through where you are sitting on the couch and you want to snuggle up with a blanket and so you grab this blanket and pull it up and all of a sudden you realize it's only coming up to about your knees. Instead of a blanket you got a blankie so then your tuck your feet in and you discover it only comes to your belt. That's the picture here it's a picture of a faith that doesn't cover your whole life. Or another way to think about it using the language that is here in verse twenty three many people saw the signs that he was performing. Some people describe it this way driving down a road and seeing a sign that is pointing to your destination maybe you are coming home to Duluth or on vacation and you see this sign pointing where to go, but you just stop right there and unpack the car at the sign on the side of the road. And you pull out the tent and say "this is it guys we have arrived". Well, no you haven't arrived you can't camp here on the side of the road. No, what you do is you press on towards what the sign is pointing too. You see the miracles of Jesus and even the miracles that you see in the church today are meant to point us to something more to Jesus himself. And so if you stop and camp out at the sign what you end up with is a shallow faith, a little faith it doesn't cover your whole life. It's a faith that can't change your life in fact it won't ever change your life. Because it is pointing to the wrong thing you stopped with the sign. So for example many of us have experienced wonderful miracles in our life we have, maybe things that should have happened to you but didn't. Some of us would say I should have been dead or I can

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think of many instances where you can say I should be dead I should not be alive right. Maybe you avoided a horrible accident or averted a major medical emergency. Or maybe it could something else where you dodged a bullet where thought you were pregnant and you weren't. Or maybe you thought you had a sexual transmitted disease that you didn't maybe you dodge a bullet in that kind of way. Or perhaps you were bailed out of a financial disaster. Or maybe your marriage should be over because of what you did, but by some miracle your spouse has decided to hang in there with you and really work on this thing. For some of us all we do is talk about the sign. The signs become like the whole thing are lives and priorities don't really change we are just the same people with a cool story about a sign. And you think about that driving to a destination and how silly that would be if you got back and all you had was pictures of that sign. A whole album of selfie's with that sign. Has the sign in your life pointed you to what the sign is pointing towards? Have you followed the sign towards the destination? Have you actually connected with Jesus or are you celebrating the sign that's' the question here.

Have you had the mercy of God lead you to the living Christ who actually does really change lives? Or are you just happy everything just turned out ok? Shallow faith says wow God thanks for getting me out of that mess, but I can take it from here God. The transcendental interferer I don't want him to get to close, I don't want him to mess up this little good thing I got going on here. Shallow faith will never get us the real life Jesus is talking about. And so it could be that our shallow faith keeps us from experiencing God's presence or it could be fear. Fear is one of those things that keep us from experiencing the presence of God. One of the reasons that Nicodemus may have come to Jesus at night is just simply because he did not want to tarnish his reputation by hanging out with Jesus. Nicodemus was one of the big shots. You know the Pharisees get a bad rap today in lots of churches or in kind of western Christianity, but they were the ones who knew what was going on. They were the ones who were really trying hard to obey the law. They were trying to do what God had told them to do in the Old Testament and Nicodemus was one of those guys. Maybe he didn't want to tarnish his reputation by being around this itinerate Rabbi. And I wonder for some of us I bet you want to be around Jesus and we want to have what he offers, but sometimes come on we live in Minnesota and we are a little afraid of coming off as to radical. Sometimes we are afraid of being too weird or sometimes we are afraid of standing out. And so maybe it's fear of what other people think of us. We like the way that Jesus turned over the table that the money-changers had bought into the temple, but were like I would never be that bold. We think that was the right thing to do and I'm glad somebody did it, but it's not going to be me. I don't want to be too out there or I don't want to be making other people uncomfortable, I don't want to be weird. Do you know anybody who knows what the truth is but don't want to draw sharp lines? Have you ever seen that person, looking in the mirror? You know what the thing is to do you know what I should be doing in this kind of situation but something like the truth is eating away at the inside of you but were afraid to speak up.

I have been reading a couple of really good books this past fall. One of books is called Fierce Conversations and the other was called Crucial Conversations. I don't know if you want to grow in your ability to have really honest conversations with other human beings on the planet but man those are two really good resources. It pushes you towards being really honest and being honorable and honoring to the people you are talking to not just being in arguing matches. Anyway that was a side note that was not part of the whole deal. That was a freebee that you can actually take to the bank because it is really helpful.

So here is the deal fear can keep us from actually experiencing the presence of God. So one of the things we end up doing because of that fear is we create our own Jesus. We begin to not look at the Jesus in the scriptures instead we begin to look at different versions of Jesus. And I love the way that we can read through the gospels and see that Christ never give us the option to look at a different Jesus. Here are a few of different Jesus' we tend to look at. One of them is the inoffensive Jesus sometimes when we become aware of negative criticism of church or Christianity that we promote kind of an inoffensive Jesus a positive Jesus. He came into the world to make us feel good about ourselves to increase our self-esteem. Or you know to encourage us to live extraordinary lives right now. But the trouble with the inoffensive, the trouble with the completely positive Jesus is it doesn't explain why such a positive message would get someone executed. Nobody is going to crucify Mr. Rogers, Jesus is not Mr. Rogers. Or sometimes we embrace the create your own savior Jesus. We are the ultimate consumers and so it's like walking into a coffee shop and we want the kind of Jesus we can order for example I want a extra large, extra hot, no whip extra caramel oh make it sugar free caramel, that's what we want right? I don't even know if you really can get that all in one drink, but you get the idea. And so we do that with Jesus we apply that to him for example we say I love the way that Jesus said to the women who was caught in adultery neither do I condemn you, but I don't like how Jesus said go and sin no more. So I want the pieces of Jesus I want and I

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don't want the pieces of Jesus I don't want. And so we become this consumer mind set creating Jesus kind of in our own likeness making him have the features we want him to have and we end up with a plastic Jesus that nobody would worship.

Or there is the political Jesus. The elections are coming up right? Do you guys get tired of it two years or a year before? It feels like we just got done elected somebody and now we have to listen to everybody again. Honestly, I have to tell you I love this time in our political calendar because everything gets so heated and everybody is like so mad at each other and I just sit back and giggle, it's like watching MMA fighting. No, it's like watching professional wrestling right? And the political right and the political left turn off more and more people both inside the church and outside the church yet amazingly people inside and outside the church when you boil kind of the agenda of Jesus down learning how to love God with all of our heart, mind and soul and strength and learning how to love our neighbor as yourselves almost everybody would embrace that. Here's the deal we are called to always promote Jesus and not our political bias. And when promote Jesus we will find that he leans towards the marginalized, he bridges the gap between racial divides, he cares for creations, he works for peace it is amazing what he does. So we are always called to promote Jesus not our biases. Or one of the other Jesus' that often gets promoted that causes people to miss out on the presences of God is the fault finding Jesus. He is represented by many people just as being the guy that points out the faults and moral failings of other people. Especially the ones that are hot topics that we don't agree with right now like those are people on the far outside right? One of things I have noticed is that the difference between being judgmental and being lovingly righteous has to do with focusing less on the issues and more on the human. When you focus less on the issue and more on the human being in front of you it makes an amazing difference. And so we adopted these goofy Jesus' that we have tried to make into our own image. Sometimes out of fear especially of him inferring in our own lives and in the lives of those around us. It is challenging to accept Jesus as he really is, but the only way to experience his presence God with us Immanuel is to not cut and paste anymore. It is to take Jesus as we find him in the scriptures.

Some people miss out not because of fear, but because of religion. Sometimes the very thing that is meant to draw us closer to the presence of God religions exercises if you well actually seem to separate us from God. Nicodemus was an incredibly religious person the text says that he was a man of the Pharisees one of the strictest observers of the Jewish law. A leader in Judaism of his day, he would have known all of the Old Testament. He would have kept the Sabbath and he would have known all of the oral traditions. He would have kept the laws and he would have been a strict observer of the Ten Commandments. There is almost no chance that this man was secretly stealing or blaspheming God or committing adultery. And yet as we read through the story he is on the verge of not getting it at all and missing out on the presence of God, God with us the person of Christ Immanuel. Sometimes we can be so busy with all the religious stuff that we miss out on God. So here is an example I love the bible, I love the scriptures I even the word scripture because it sounds so cool and what invokes for me. Ever since I have been a follower of Jesus I have been reading through the scriptures all the way through pretty much every single year. And every once in awhile I don't make it all the way through, but I don't beat myself up about it I just start again. I say January first cool I am starting again, Genesis 1:1 let's do this thing again. And I love the way that God as rearranged my life as I have let the scriptures into me. I love the way that book actually changes the way I live my life and the Holy Spirit to me through that book. But here is the deal the scriptures are not the meal, the scriptures are like the menu that point us to the meal. The scriptures are like the sign on the side of the road pointing you to the meal. The scriptures point us to Jesus. And what the scriptures are drawing us into is real interactive, authentic, experiential, and personal and I am looking for more words to say and a relationship with Jesus. That is what scriptures are pointing us towards. While I love the scriptures I would never sit down at a restaurant and pull out the condiments and spread them over the menu and try cutting it up into little pieces and eat it. Because it is pointing me towards the meal of having a real relationship with Jesus so never let religion become the thing. Always let what we are doing to grow spiritually push us towards the thing. In worship the thing is Jesus and these are all vehicles to help us get there. Does that make sense? So never just settle for the menu always go for the meal. And that is all being said after I said I love the scriptures. Now, don't email and say Michael hates the bible you would be wrong because I love the bible. But you could search the bible for your whole life and miss the life giving presence of God.

Or lastly, sometimes you can miss out because of spiritual darkness. Throughout the book of John he uses night not only to reference a time of day like when Nicodemus came it was literally night, but also John uses night to referred to a spiritually condition. Nicodemus was in a spiritual condition of night because inside Nicodemus there was a spiritual darkness and so what is it that Nicodemus needs to deal with

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spiritual darkness inside of him? Well, what does any person need? What does a parent need? Or a student need? What does a teacher need? What does a business person? What does single adult need? What does a married couple need? What do church goers need? What does an atheist need or an agnostic person need? Or a teenager need? Or anyone you can think of when asked what do people need to deal with the night inside of them? Jesus' answer to this question is completely revolutionary what he says in V3 is that you need a completely brand new life. Listen to V3 In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." This is like the most revolutionary approach to the problem of humanity that anyone ever suggested or as ever suggested. You need a totally new life. No one can see the kingdom of God Jesus says, no one can have God reigning in their life no one can come under God's kingdom and God's control no one can really discover who the signs are pointing to no one can have a faith that covers their whole life and live with God forever unless they get a brand new life. To be born again it's not just like listening to your favorite album for the two hundredth time and go wow, I finally get it! I'm born again. No, it's like having a brand new life that Jesus is talking about like a whole new thing. You see if we were designing this whole process we would do it differently and we have. And so if we were designing this whole process we would say your life is like a house and you're inviting God to come live in it. What you might say is well my house needs some touch up on the paint and if God's going to come I need to fix my drippy faucet. Or I might need to do this thing or that thing. I might even need to pull up the carpet and refinish the wood floor. And what Jesus is pointing to when he says born again is no that's not going to fix the deal what you need is for this house to be completely destroyed and the ground cleared off completely and then we are going to build a whole new house. It's a whole new life. It's not just a renovation of your life.

Or if your life were a car and you were inviting God to come drive it. You might say well I need to tune it up and get fresh oil and new tires. And I might need to take to the car wash and clean it up and then it will be ready right? And again, no, you need to take it to the junkyard and smash it into a size of a loaf of bread. And throw that thing away and get a whole new life. Do you see how the presence of God is challenging he is interfering in everything. His not just saying you can add some salt to the stew of your life and it's going to taste great. No, that bad and we need to throw it out and start again because there is a whole new recipe for this thing. You don't get the night out of your soul by a few changes on the surfaces. You can get counseling or you can learn new communications skill along with healthy ways to resolve conflict and better money management and end up at the exact same place six month later because the night is still in our soul.

One of my most favorite books to read besides the bible the book by C.S Lewis called Mere Christianity and I haven't quoted for a whole month so let me quote again. Here is what Lewis writes, the terrible thing the almost impossible thing is to hand over your whole self all your wishes and precautions to Christ. But, it is far easier than what we are trying to do instead, for what we are trying to do is to remain what we call ourselves, to keep personal happiness as our great aim in life and yet at the same time trying to be good. We are all trying to let our mind and heart go their own way centered on money pleasure or on ambition hoping in spite of this to behave honestly and humbly. And that is exactly what Christ warned us you could not do. As he said a thistle cannot produce figs. If I'm a field that contains nothing but grass seed I cannot produce wheat. Cutting the grass might keep it short, but I still shall produce grass and no wheat. If I want to produce wheat the change must go deeper than the surface I must be plowed up and re sown.

Here is the question, have you been plowed up yet? Remember Matthew chapter six Jesus said seek ye first his kingdom and his righteousness. If you want to experience God's kingdom you have to allow the field to get completely plowed up and re sown. All brand new seed has to be put in so that it will work. According to Jesus it's not more counseling or psychotherapy. Sigmund Freud doesn't have the answer to the human condition. Carl Marks sharing our resources is not the answer to the human condition. Rearranging social structures is not the answer to the human condition. Jesus is the answer to the human condition. It is that we need a whole brand new life. One more quote from C.S Lewis last one. Jesus Christ never taught us vague idealistic gas (ok I have to pause here because I don't even know how to use that today vague idealistic gas, oh I guess I can think of several ways to us that anyways I better move on now) Jesus Christ never taught us vague idealistic gas when he said be perfect he meant it. He meant that we must go in for the full treatment it is hard, but the sort of compromise we are all hankering after is harder in fact it is impossible. It may be hard for an egg to turn into a bird, but it would be a jolly sight harder for it to learn to fly while remaining an egg. We are like eggs at the present and you cannot go on indefinitely just being an ordinary decent egg we must be hatch or go bad. Let me say this have you been hatched? In Junior high my mom said I had been hatched, I thought that was great. I don't know what she meant by

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that, but I took it as a compliment. A few moms out there are laughing and saying that was not a compliment. I know but I just choose to.

Have we been hatched yet? Have we allowed the presence of God to completely transform our lives? Have we been there yet? So how does this happen? Well that's the question Nicodemus asks right? V4 "How can a man be born when he is old? Nicodemus asked "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" What he is asking here is and what were asking is how a person can totally and completely change after living our lives in one direction with the kind of parents we had or with the dreams that we have had and with the habits that we have had. How can a person change? How do you get the night out of your soul? V5 Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless his is born of water and the spirit." Becoming a new person is a matter of a new birth. And Jesus calls it being born of water and spirit and this little phrase as been argued about for centuries. What does it mean? Some say that the water part is like water baptism and that unless you go through baptism and receive the Holy Spirit you can't see the kingdom of God. Some people say no, no that's not it its amniotic fluid and then you're into gross birth stories. They say it like the fluid and that each of us needs a natural birth and a spiritual birth that's what Jesus is talking about. But listen no one in the time of Jesus would have understood anything about Christian baptism. Christian baptism came later and Jesus isn't talking about let. No one in the ancient world ever referred to natural birth as being coming by water. And so the best explanation is that Jesus is not describing two different births one of water and one of spirit he is describing one birth. And the grammar suggests that he put all this together as a spiritual water birth. Jesus is saying that unless you have a spiritual water birth you can't enter the kingdom of God. Well, where does that come from? It actually comes from Ezekiel chapter thirty six where Jesus is talking about a new convent, a brand new way that people of God are going to relate to the presence of God. And here is what is written in Ezekiel chapter thirty six V25 I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. V26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; and I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. V27 And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. Through the prophet Ezekiel God is promising when a people would be sprinkled as it were with water he is talking about an out pouring of the Holy Spirit. He is saying that we will be cleansed and that we will be given a new heart and receives a new nature. So how do we get that? Well, Jesus goes on to say that flesh gives birth to flesh, but the spirit gives birth to the spirit. And so this total renovation of the soul, this new heart, this new life it doesn't just happen by gradual evolution a little better day after day so that one day you become a total new person. No, that's not the way it happens. You don't grow into a new life by making little changes along the way, that's how you grow in your life, but not how you just a brand new whole life. It's not like I'm going to work on my temper and once I got that down then I'm going to work on financial management and then I will get a personal trainer and lose some weight. The radical change that Jesus is talking about is really different in that he is talking about not a gradual evolution of the self flesh gives birth to the flesh, but the spirit gives birth to the spirit.

Here's the deal we can't produce this new life ourselves. The new birth is completely beyond the capabilities of human ability. Only the Holy Spirit can produce this kind of new life in us. So three times in this passage Jesus says you must be born again. You have to be born again. And there is this mystery to the whole thing it's not completely understandable and so he uses this whole illustration of wind. One of the things I have done over the course of my life is I love sitting outside and painting and drawing. And when you're sitting outside and you're just sitting still for a while do you ever watch the wind and the trees especially when they have leaves on them. And some are blowing this way and some are blowing that way and some are filtering up and some are filtering down and you just think for a minute what in the heck is the wind doing. You can't see the wind, but you can see the effect that it has. It's the same thing that is true you can look at one another and see the Holy Spirit beginning to work in our lives. Here is another illustration that fits northern Minnesota better. Is there anybody who likes fishing? Is there anybody who likes the idea of finishing? I like catching a lot. Is anybody a serious ice fisherman? You guys are weird like seriously you guys are weird I have never done that I have lived here since 1986 and I have never been ice fishing. If you are really good and you die I might like to come with you and try this once. I'm just trying to figure out what the deal is you sit on the ice with a bucket for a chair. Some people say they have a nice house with a satellite and I say yeah I have that at home why would I need to go sit on a frozen lake I just don't get this at all. Anyway, so forget all of that. Here is a fishing illustration of the Spirit working. So picture this that you're swimming along with your fish buddies and all of the sudden one of your fish buddies starts acting weird and he starts throwing his head from side to side. And pretty soon he goes up

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and he goes down and you're thinking that Bob as lost it. And then pretty soon Bob jumps out of the water and never comes back and you're thinking what in the heck ever happened to Bob and then you think he kind of lost it and went nuts. But what you couldn't see was while you were eating that day Bob bit into something that had a fishing line attached to it that you never saw. And so even around us in community when you can see the Holy Spirit working in someone's life and you're just thinking wow that person is weird. Maybe the Holy Spirit is actually doing something and you can't see the line that Father God is fishing with. Do you get what I'm talking about? Part of this is a mystery. We don't even know how it all this works and we try to explain it away to one another and we lose all the mystery of this thing. We don't understand why the spirit blows into someone's life. And we don't understand why God decides sends the spirit like he does, but just like the wind we can see the effects of it and it changes everything. You see when you experience new birth in Christ it doesn't mean that your instantly made perfect. I love right before Martin Luther's assination he was preaching in a church in Los Angeles and he quoted an old slave preacher who said this and I love it. We ain't what we ought to be, we ain't what we want to be, we ain't what were going to be, but thank God we ain't what we was.

And when this new birth begins to happen in our lives it begins to change and rearrange everything. When I look at my life I can look back and say man I'm not the same person I was a couple of years ago and I say thank you Lord. And all my kids say praise Jesus. No, I'm just joking it's really what Brenda says right? Here is the deal the issues is not do you remember the exact moment the wind began to blow in your life that is not the biggest issue. The biggest issue and sometimes I think we put too much emphasis trying to nail down the exact moment the wind of the spirit began to blow. The issue is this do you see the effects of the wind blowing in your life? Do you see the effects of the Holy Spirit working in your life? Do you see change in your life that cannot be explained naturally, but could only be explained by the activity of the Holy Spirit? Is there anything in our life that could only be explained by direct intervention of God? If you can't point to something in your life right to which you can say the evidence of the Holy Spirit is remaking me. There is evidence that the Holy Spirit is giving me a new heart. Well then what do you do. Well I can guarantee you it's not going to be easy. This is not an easy thing to address because what we need is an intervention in our lives. And this takes us down to V14 and Jesus quotes this obscure little passage where he said, "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert so the son of Man must be lifted up. V15 that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life in him". Jesus is referring to an Old Testament story from Numbers twenty one in which the Israelites are dying of a plague that results from being bitten by poisonous snakes. They were dying in droves because a bunch of snakes got loose and were biting people. And they come to Moses and say pray to God, met with God and tell us what to do. Moses goes and meets with God and here is what God tells him to do Numbers 21:V8 The Lord said to Moses, "Make a bronze snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live. Is there anybody here in the medical profession does that sound like a great way to deal with snake-bites? Even back then I can picture Moses going Oh Lord. And it's not really a prayer it's more of a lament like oh Lord are you kidding me they are not going to take to this very well. And sure enough a bunch of them didn't. Ok, you are all dying of snake bites so could I get a couple of artist to make me a bronze snake. You will have to start a fire and then go find some bronze and melt it and you're going to need to build this thing and then you are going to have to hold it on a pole. He said all you need to do here is look at it and guess what the Israelites did? Well a whole bunch of them said that is the most stupid idea we have ever heard. An honestly it kind of is. You just have to be honest about this because it is kind of dumb plan for people with poisonous snake-bites. Don't go and try that if you are out camping and a water moccasin bites you. And what happened is those who said that was a dumb idea and would not put their gaze up there they died. And the Israelites that said that is the dumbest thing I have ever heard but I trust God I'm going to use this and they looked at it and they lived. What's the deal? Is the deal about snakes up on poles no, Jesus says the deal is really clearly when he says in John 3:14 the Son of Man must be lifted up, V15 that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. He is pointing to himself as with that snake on the pole and he is basically saying I must be lifted on the cross so that everyone who looks to me can receive a life that is going to heal the night inside of them. You see what that does is that counter acts what our very parents in the garden did. God said do you remember? Don't eat of this tree and they basically said uh you know God that's not great plan for living and so we are going to do this plan. And they brought separation between us and God that has existed since then. And what Jesus is doing by quoting this story out of Numbers twenty one he is saying the deal is trust, do you trust that God has your best at heart. Do you trust that God loves you and wants the best for you look to him. He can actually heal the night in your soul.

And then comes our favorite verse the verse that is on seventies head bands and multicolored hair at

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sporting events. John 3:16 V16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. You know it doesn't seem like just putting our trust and confidence in Jesus will heal the night in our soul. And for the last couple thousand years there is a lot of people on the planet who have said that is the dumbest idea I have ever heard. But those who do it experience a life that is truly life. When Jesus is talking about eternal life in the Greek New Testament he is not referring not only to a life that last forever that's a given, but it is referring to a quality of life that effects every single part of what you say and do and who you are. It is God's kind of life, it's John 10:10 I have come that they may have life, and have it to the fullest. It's like a whole different way of living. And when you look at John 3:16 look at who does the loving look at who is the initiator and the sustainer of John 3:16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. It is God who does this thing it is something that God has done. It is God's move it is God's action it is God's grace it is God's intervention. God is the one who takes the initiative God is the one who notices the problem God is the one who fixes the problem. The work of God's spirit brings us new birth. Do you realize that you are the object of God's love? And it's not just like God loved the world where you get a letter at home saying dear occupant I love you like that's not very meaningful dear occupant I love you. I don't know about you, but to me that would be junk mail. No, God is like speaking to us, he is saying Michael I love you, for God so loved Joey, for God so loved Stephanie, for God so loved Michael that he gave us one and only son. It's like that's what this is about there is this incredibly personalized love. Not just this general occupant thing. And then we are invited to respond to that and we are invited to submit and surrender to that. For God so loved the world that he gave us one and only Son, that whoever believes in him. That whoever looks to him and that whoever puts their confidence and trust in him. I don't know where you are at in this story between you and God. I don't know what stage you are at with him maybe you're here today and you never have actually looked at him. Maybe you have explored this message because of fear or of shallowness. Maybe you have just stopped at the sign I don't know where you are at in that story. But the thing I'm inviting you to do no matter where you are at in that story is to put your confidence in Jesus in real life and in real hope. And when things are going tough in your life it is the easy thing to do we turn to God and say God I need you. And if you are going through tough stuff and you need to experience the comfort of God I believe that God wants to meet you in a real personal way right now today. Not just like sometime in life, but today in this moment I believe he wants to meet you. And then for others of us life is going well and not really interested with being interfered that much then this is actually way more important for you, this is like really important for you. If you have areas of your life that are like God keep your hands out, God I like things and this and this about you, but not this about you then this is a big deal. Because you can't make God into your own image and experience the life he is talking about it is impossible. You have to let Jesus be Jesus and then you have to look to him and trust that that's actually the way it's supposed to work. And even though it is confrontive and even though there are parts of it I don't like it's like I can meet him right there. And then you can get to experience what God really has. I don't want you to miss out on Immanuel God with us. In this whole series of message has helped draw us closer to that so that on Christmas morning you will actually know Jesus better than you did at the beginning of the month. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, gracious and living Son of God, Christ. And, Holy Spirit, thank you for your presence and your deep, deep love for us. And I just invite you right now to come and move and work into each one of us, just come and move and work. For those who need comfort, Holy Spirit would you bring immense comfort. Would you meet us in the place of struggle or pain we are in right now. I ask that you would bring healing. I thank you for the miraculous that you do. It is so incredibly awesome how you bring healing into our lives in such deep ways Lord. As we pray for one another would you bring healing? But I ask that you would never let us stop just with the sign. Would you draw us into deep trusting and committed believing and receiving relationship with you interactive something we can experience every moment of the day, would you draw us into that as we put our trust in you Lord Jesus. And, Father, for those of us who are challenged with the parts of you and the parts Christ and the parts of the Holy Spirit that just annoy us. We just don't get it and it makes some of mad. Lord, would you give us the courage to come to you even right now to get prayer from one another and hear what you think about that. That we would just listen to you and would you continue to challenge us and interfere as it were in every single part of our lives. Your kingdom come on earth has it is in heaven. That is a prayer asking God to interfere and so Lord would you come. Amen. Come and get prayer today.