

Series: Advent 2021

Sermon: "Emmanuel the Hope of Glory"

Text: 1 John 3:1; Revelation 21; Colossians 1:24-27

RGJR/FBCCS/12-26-21 UNEDITED

- In the 16th century, a Polish guy made an astonishing assertion. Nicholas Copernicus, an astronomer, a scientist, declared that contrary to common belief and contrary to the doctrine of the established church, that the sun does not rotate around the earth rather the earth rotates around the sun. Reality is *heliocentric* rather than *geocentric*.
- Now, most of us probably accept heliocentrism—that the earth rotates around the sun—as a given. BUT, be honest, have you ever watched a sunrise, paid attention then to the noon day sun and seen it setting at night? If Copernicus hadn't suggested otherwise, we could be forgiven for concluding that that big, bright yellow ball in the sky was actually rotating around the earth as it traveled from horizon to horizon.
- Copernicus' observation did more than set the matter straight on this sun-centered reality. This is why it is sometimes called the "*Copernican Revolution*." It was a revolution in the sense that it changed how many of us think about knowing reality.
- Copernicus taught us that we could not always believe our own deceiving eyes to tell us truth.
- Another scientist and philosopher, Michael Polanyi, explained it like this: "***When the Copernican revolution had finished refuting these ideas and had inspired in their stead a great new system governed by natural laws, the common man's confidence that he could understand the world in terms of his ordinary experiential perceptions was shattered. He agreed henceforth to accept UNCONDITIONALLY the SCIENTIFIC view of things, however absurd some of it might appear to him.***" (Meaning; Polanyi and Prosch p142)

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- Science, with its so-called “natural laws” has been very useful. It has made many advances in our understanding of how things work and made many wonderful inventions possible like Diet Coke, iPhones Teslas and even, especially, neatly packaged communion elements.
- Science often makes accurate predictions that are practically useful-- up to a point.
- It wasn’t long after Copernicus that *theologians* wanted in on the smarty-pants revolution. “Hmmm? Maybe if we approach God and his Word more “***scientifically***” as Copernicus approached astronomy—maybe we will get more information and we will be able to be *absolutely certain* about many more of the realities pertaining to God and his role in our lives.
- For some of us, a desire for the feeling of control in our lives that a sense of certainty can bring is a desire that is addictive. We want to know that we know stuff.
- The question that was sometimes ignored is, “*Can we truly know God, His word and his work in creation in the “scientific” sense of the Copernican Revolution?*” The short answer is we cannot. We cannot know fully this way because God, His Word and His work in creation are not limited by the so-called “*natural laws*” that have bound science and made it work well so often.
- One strange reason I love Christmas time is that it always reminds me I just can’t know everything I would like to know about God with absolute certainty. I may act like I do and sometimes talk like I do, because that makes me feel more in control, but I don’t.
- *Advent* focuses us on Christmas. Christmas is the coming of Jesus. The coming of Jesus is the *incarnation* of God. The incarnation is Emmanuel—God with us—and, here is my admission, I can’t explain how that reality works with a certainty bounded by natural laws.

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- This year during our advent season, Mary and I have shared four broad topics related to Emmanuel leading up to Christmas. Her job was to tell you about these topics as she might introduce them to our children and grandchildren. *My* assignment was to address the four topics using bigger words in such a way that I always sounded ***certain***. Not really!
- It’s dangerous in our times of hit or miss for expecting every one of us to gather on every single Sunday, but my assignment was to play the *“long game.”*
- Recall the three prior topics and then add today’s. They were: *time, relationship, redemption* and, for today, *glory*.
- 1st: Concerning Emmanuel and ***time***, we talked about *chronos* and *kairos* time—two very different ways of thinking about time. Those are helpful concepts but, I’ll let you in on a secret, they don’t explain with certainty in scientific terms bounded by natural laws how the timeless, infinite God could be Emmanuel—God with us in time. But, the reality is that God did just that!
- 2nd: Concerning Emmanuel and ***relationships***, we talked of God, as infinite Creator existing in an eternal, perfect relationship of love choosing then to be in personal relationship—even a loving sacrificial relationship with mere creatures like us. This was expressed in Jesus—God—Emmanuel as he walked this earth.
- All I could say to explain this is that *“this is how God is—this is who God is.”* God is the unique infinite One in Three who invites the finite us to dance in his eternal dance of love. I like that picture, but it doesn’t explain anything “scientifically” bounded by natural laws any more than the analogy of water, ice and steam can capture with certainty the meaning of the Trinity’s 3 yet 1.

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- 3rd: We talked of Emmanuel and ***redemption***. This is where the big difference between Mary’s positive outlook and my more negative way of seeing most things showed rather clearly.
- I took you on a frightening tour in the dark of a excrement filled bat cave and compared that to what it was like for Jesus to walk this stinking broken, sinful earth. In reality, that stinking bat-cave illustration couldn’t even begin to explain with “scientific certainty” how the absolute perfection of God could descend with absolute humility to the sinfulness of this world as Emmanuel and neither destroy the world at the first touch of holiness nor be contaminated himself by the brokenness and sin.
- [BTW: I told you I searched to get this picture and the spelling of bat “guano.” If you don’t have a sense someone is paying attention all the time, let me tell you that all week since then I have been receiving email suggestions for something I might like to buy from Amazon—Bat fertilizer!]
- Human beings have been doing theology and biblical theology for millennia. We have been trying to know the answers about God with certainty and then systematize them and put them in books ever since we knew there were questions to be answered.
- Religions and human systems of knowledge have tried to capture with certainty the explanation of ***Emmanuel***—how it all worked for God to be with us. Many will have claimed to have done so—to have explained all the questions I just admitted I cannot fully explain with scientific certainty bounded by natural laws and many more questions about Emmanuel on top of these three.
- So, right now, I will speak theologically to their claims of certainty. ***Poppycock!*** Or if you’d like that in theological *Greek*; ***Skubala!***

- My long game strategy over these weeks was meant to leave us hungering for the fourth topic—**glory**, even if we didn't know that's what we were missing.
- The word "glory," in this advent series is simply our shorthand for "*the consummation of it all*"—all that God has been doing through all of history including this critical reality of becoming Emmanuel—God with us.
- We will not understand the incarnation with the scientific certainty bounded by natural laws. Ultimately, understanding Emmanuel with certainty will be out of our control—frustratingly so for those of us who like to know things for certain to feel in control.
- The Apostle John, who walked and talked with Jesus—a man who loved Jesus and was loved by him admitted as much about a similar idea in his first epistle chapter **3 beginning at verse 1**. He wrote: ***How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ² Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. ³ Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.***
- Speaking of just the aspect of who we are when we have trusted in Jesus Christ, John says we don't even yet fully know all that this new identity of ours means. We won't know this until we see him as he is when he is revealed in all of his **glory**. Then we will understand it better. Today, we cannot hope to explain it all with scientific certainty bounded by natural laws.
- Again, "glory" is my shorthand this morning for a yet to be fully revealed reality—ultimately that is the glorious culmination of

things God is doing with Creation, humans, history, redemption, church, and your life. It will reveal Emmanuel for who he fully is.

- When we are given even hints of this "**glory**" they can help us understand just a bit better things that are not explainable by Copernicus' "science bounded by natural laws"
- One example would be the day Peter James and John went to a mountaintop with Jesus. About a week earlier, Peter had confessed he believed Jesus to be *the Christ, "the Son of the Living God."* Jesus agreed with that title and added, "*This means I must, suffer and die.*"
- Then, on the mountaintop, Jesus was transfigured before their very eyes. Matthew records, "***His face shone like the sun and his clothes became as white as the light.***" They watched as Jesus talked with Moses and Elijah. They listened as out of the cloud that had surrounded them they heard the voice of God the Father saying, "***This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well-pleased. Listen to him!***"
- They had seen Jesus work miracles. They had watched him love people. They had heard him teach wisdom and truth, but now, as some more of the glory that is coming peeks through in Emmanuel, they must be asking again, "*Really now! Really, just exactly who is this man?*" He is Emmanuel—**God** with us!
- Later, after Jesus' death, John, who had seen the glowing Jesus, was in the upper room with other disciples. They were afraid when Jesus suddenly just appeared among them and commanded, "***Peace be with you!***"
- "*No, he said. It really is me. Look at the wounds from which I died.*" Then he, Jesus of Nazareth—Emmanuel—**God** with them had the pull in the Trinity—the authority of God to breath the Spirit of God

into them and the authority to make them God's ministers of forgiveness of sins.

- *Who is this guy? Well, he is God! This Jesus is Emmanuel—**GOD** with us! Yes really, truly, **God** with us!!* More of the glory is revealed. More of reality is made visible. More truth is uncovered. None of it is scientifically measurable in the terms of natural laws but it is all real—all truth.
- If we stick with what the Apostle John saw of the glory we would have to cap it off with the fullest revelation of the truth we have about who this Jesus is—of the fact that he is God with us found in the **Book of Revelation**.
- For example, let me read from the last chapter we have of the whole story—the most glory we get to see of the whole reality of just who Emmanuel actually is. This revelation of glory overwhelms any remnant sense that we might be able to figure out Emmanuel—the incarnation—Jesus Christ the LORD with scientific thinking bounded by so-called natural laws. Listen to what John wrote...
- ***Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ 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. ⁴ He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."*** So now, here we have "God with us" again—**Emmanuel** revealed with a fuller view of glory. Listen to the glory...

⁵ He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

⁶ He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. ⁷ He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son..."

- Then John is told what happens to those who refuse to believe and is taken on a tour of a perfect heavenly city that has come down to an earth that can once again contain it. John is surprised because of what he doesn't see but now, with more glory of Jesus Christ, Emmanuel revealed, he can understand why. Revelation 21:22 picks up at this point...

I did not see a temple in the city, (WHY?) because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. ²³ The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. ²⁴ The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. ²⁵ On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. ²⁶ The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. ²⁷ Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

- I can imagine John thinking... "Wow! That is the guy I walked and camped with for 3 years. That's the guy I fished with and ate with and joked with. That's my beloved, truly human friend, Jesus. BUT, I get it now better than ever before! Jesus is **Emmanuel**—Jesus is VERY

*TRULY **GOD** with us—the glory surrounding him that I can see now is so bright, there is no more need for the sun to shine in earth's sky.*

- And, John knew for sure, at that point, *"The dirty, broken, dark world stinking of the excrement of sin is no match for the full glory of God revealed in Jesus that is to come!"*
- Of course, now that our world's standard of truth is "scientific measurements bounded by natural law," none of this glory can work. It can't be real. It has to be a religious fairy tale believed only by gullible people. Maybe there really was a man, Jesus. Maybe he could be called "Emmanuel." BUT **GOD** truly with us—God in all that glory that has been and is being revealed? No way!!
- OK, I get it. If your standards of reality are science bounded by natural laws, this Jesus—in fact, God, as he reveals himself, doesn't fit.
- I'm not trying to convince you of that today. I'm speaking to some other folks and I'm going to say something even more ludicrous—something that can't fit even more so even to those of us who think reality goes beyond the confines of "natural laws and scientific reasoning."
- It is this unbelievable—impossible-to-fit truth that made me play the long game over these four sermons so I could lead to this truth.
- The Apostle Paul writing to the church of Colossae said these words in chapter 1 beginning at verse ,,,

²⁴ Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. ²⁵ I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness— ²⁶ the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. ²⁷ To them God has

chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you (that's not an individual emphasis that's "in all y'all" as the body of Christ) Christ in you, the hope of glory.

- Paul was willing to suffer whatever necessary for this truth to be revealed as far and as wide as possible. He was willing to suffer so the church—the body of Christ might be what it was meant to be in this broken sinful world. It is his very commission from God to tell this truth.
- The truth has been hidden but now as the glory of Jesus, Emmanuel has been more and more revealed, it is no longer a hidden truth to the church. Now, surprise, surprise, even the Gentiles who believe in Jesus, not just Jewish believers are part of this truth.
- Emmanuel God with us, came and we can't explain all that that means. Now we find out Christ, Emmanuel, God with us ***is in us together!*** Right now, today, this moment, Christ is *in* us and this is the hope of more glory being revealed.
- In scientific terms bounded by natural laws, I can't fully explain to you how the timeless entered time—how the Creator could be in real relationship with creatures or how the Holy One could walk in a corrupted fallen world. I might wish I could speak with certainty to all of these matters and even more. I can't
- BUT tougher than this, because I am one of you. I know how life feels. I know about doubts and fears. I know about failures and sin—so, just like some of you, I can't explain how Christ could be in us in such a way that we can have the hope of seeing glory together.
- Does that seem real to you? Is it truth? Like those aspects of the incarnation beyond my ability to understand and explain, I can't

measure this presence of God in us scientifically, but the Bible says it is true. So, contrary to some indicators I am going to believe it!

- All of that holy, eternal, God-glorifying power is in us. The Alpha and Omega the beginning and the end is IN US!
- Sometimes as I meditate on this I wonder why we don't just explode from containing the glory that is already in us because of Christ.
- On Christmas Eve, I talked with more than one person back for their annual Christmas visit to FBC. I talked with more than one person who wanted to know how in the world we were going to "pull-off" the mission that is set before us as we change many longstanding things about FBC that we are used to and with which we are comfortable.
- They probably weren't even aware of some of the additional reasons that question is so important to me and to us right now. It was Christmas Eve so I didn't take time to answer fully.
- But here is my answer for us to ponder: "WE are not going to pull-off anything. WE can't! I can't! You can't! Fact is, we never could.
- *But, have you thought about Jesus being Emmanuel? God WITH us? Have you thought about how wonderful that is—so wonderful we can't explain it in terms that are acceptable to many? Have you considered what was revealed in Emmanuel?*
- *Well, guess what! That Emmanuel—that God with us—that Christ is in us and he is our only hope of any glory being revealed. We can't do it but we can trust him to do it in us an through us together for God's glory. I can't put that absolute truth in scientific terms bounded by natural laws but I believe it is truth.*