

AND I IN YOU

IT SEEMS AS IF AT LEAST ONCE EVERY WINTER, by mysterious seasonal clockwork, I spin off the road and end up in the ditch. Now I assure you (hand on Bible) that this is not from sloppy or inattentive driving. Nor is it the result of being helplessly ignorant of the techniques for driving on snow and/or ice. Born and raised in the Midwest, I know how to do that. No, honestly (hand over heart), these annual events are pure happenstance—temporally speaking, that is.

Saturday last I was on my way into town for a few groceries. The recent blizzard had deposited a windblown eleven inches of snow on Madison County, but the gravel road had been well plowed. Even so, I had the Jeep's four-wheel-drive on and was driving carefully. One curve, however, masked its ice well. In the middle of the curve I began to slide; I compensated, bringing the rear end of the Jeep back around. But I apparently *over-compensated*, thus sending the tail of the Jeep sliding too far in the opposite direction. There was nothing for it as I helplessly slid sideways into the hip-deep snow of the ditch.



Oddly enough (funny the timing of these things), the next day my lesson for our adult Sunday School class was on the name "Immanuel" (with us is God), during which, according to my notes penned earlier in the week, I would pose the question to the class, "What are some of the ways Jesus is with us?"

Reviewing my notes prior to class, I realized I had a perfect answer to that query. For just moments after my Jeep slid into the ditch and I was hopelessly stuck, someone who lived nearby came by in his pickup truck. He pulled up alongside, rolled down his window, and without a moment's hesitation told me he would return home to fetch some chains to pull me out. Upon his return we hooked his chains to the back of the Jeep and yanked it part of the way out. Then he came around and we yanked it from the front, which finally brought me back onto the road. Throughout he was friendly, generous, and helpful. He made no mention of how this was going to make him late to wherever he had been going.

Now, I have no clue as to the spiritual condition of that "Good Samaritan." I have no idea about his relationship with the Lord. Doesn't matter; he was "Immanuel" to me in that moment. He was God alongside me in tangible form.

"Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel."

Isaiah 7:14

This is no philosophical exercise dreamed up by Isaiah, not just some metaphysical word-picture to shame the errant King Ahaz. This prophesied the very real birth of God on earth in the form of the baby Jesus. But beyond that, it also pictured the kind of relationship God would have with those who believed in His Son. Jesus Himself explained it to His disciples shortly before His arrest and crucifixion.

"I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. After a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you *will* see Me; because I live, you will live also. In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him. If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him."

John 14:18-21,23b

The intimacy of relationship described by the Lord is breathtaking: Jesus is *in* Father God; believers are *in* Jesus and Jesus is *in* believers. More than that, this level of intimacy is not just supernatural, not just something simmering and percolating beneath the surface, beyond the senses of human flesh. No, Jesus goes on to say that "I will love him and will disclose Myself to him." He will manifest Himself, make Himself clear, He will declare Himself openly! And then, as if that were not enough already, Jesus caps it with, "My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him." With those who love Jesus, the Father and the Son set up permanent residence. Here to stay. Not just visitors or renters, but *owners*.

This means that wherever we are, Jesus and the Father (and, of course, the Holy Spirit) are *with* us. No matter our situation, we have all of Them alongside, listening, seeing, counseling, helping.

So when I spin out and end up in the ditch on a cold snowy day, before I can even utter a wordless prayer skyward my Lord is already answering it. Because He is stuck in the ditch *with* me.

And He has the power to send for help.

