

The Pastor's Pen

**“O Come, O Come Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel, that
mourns in lonely exile here, until the Son of God appear!
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel”**

This is the very first verse of one of my *absolute favorite* Christmas hymns. The reason is that this song *causes me to remember*. Remember *what?* Well, I am so very glad that you asked! It causes me to remember *being a slave to sin* mourning in the lonely exile of spiritual bondage. It also causes me to remember *the constant shame I lived under* due to my bondage. And, this song also causes me to remember that, no matter how hard I tried, I *never* could *free myself* of the chains of my sin. I bet that you can remember some of those same things, if you stop and go back into the memories of your mind.

Remembering is a *very good practice* for believers. It is very good for us to remember the holy fear we first felt as we realized the terror of the true and just penalty of our sins. I do indeed remember...but, praise the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I *also remember* the day Jesus rescued me!

You know, we can try as we hard as we want to, and we can shop for as many Black Friday bargains as we can find. But...Christmas will *always be a disappointment* to us until we remember the meaning of Emmanuel's Name – ‘*God with us.*’ I am so thankful that this great hymn of the faith does not call us to pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps and do better for ourselves. Instead of that, it reminds us that – because of His unbelievably great love and mercy – Jesus *comes to us* in our despair. His Name – “Emmanuel” – *shouts* to us that He *knows*

full well that we *can't fix ourselves*. That's one *reason* why He has given us this particular Name by which to call Him! This Christmas, may we cry out to Jesus from our hearts for His presence with us – and may we refuse to be satisfied with less than Him.

During this first week of Advent Season I want to challenge you to consider the words to the following prayer, that it might become the cry of each of our hearts as we enter into this sacred Season.

“O Come, Lord Jesus! O Come, Emmanuel! *Set me free* from the meaninglessness and futility of this world's attempt to define Christmas! The world's attempt to define Christmas looks just like everything else sinful worldlings touch. They strip away everything that gives weight and beauty to Christmas and then, like a child opening a shiny but empty gift box, they wonder why their heart is not thrilled by the empty box. But, worldlings are lost and so I should not expect anything other than that. My problem, Lord, is that I so easily fall prey that very same lie...even though I know better. It seems that I am forever trying to cram my heart full of other things – trying to find life in them. Yet I know full well that, 100% of the time, all of those things fail to give me the life that I have sought in them.

Emmanuel, because You are gracious, *enable* me to put aside the meaninglessness of this world's version of Christmas. Emmanuel, please shine the light of Your presence in my heart, so I'll truly rejoice! Please...Come to *me* this Christmas. I need *You*.

Because You are the One my heart truly longs for – even when I foolishly look in all the wrong places – please *cause* me to be *utterly dissatisfied* with anything less than You. Because of Who You are,

Emmanuel, *draw* my longing heart to cling to the promise of this great hymn and to...*'Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.'*

As we enter the season of Advent this week, I pray that your hearts will overflow with the Laughter of the Redeemed.

Heath