

December 1, 2019

“Longing for Christmas”

Isaiah 44:1-5

FCF: Haunting sense something is wrong between us and God

PROPOSITION: (anchor) The news of Christmas meets our deepest longings.

(magnet) We need to give it a hearing.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

It may seem strange to speak of ghosts at Christmas. It would really be out of place were it not for Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* and the ghosts of Christmases past, present, and future paying visit to Ebenezer Scrooge. They haunted him. But the truth is that we are haunted as well - not by ghosts but by a sense that something is off, amiss. We are haunted by a sense that something is wrong - in this world, in us, between us, and between us and our Creator.

In that sense, we too are haunted. But take heart. There is good news from God Himself.

SCRIPTURE READING: [Isaiah 44:1-5](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

Good news needs to be heard. That's getting all the harder in China ([READ WORLD](#)):

In July, a 6-year-old Chinese Bible app called WeDevote marked a major milestone: 10 million installations. With its slick design, respect for copyrights, and curated Bible reading plans and devotionals, WeDevote stands apart from other Bible applications for smartphones and tablets available in China.

The app is a much-needed resource for Chinese Christians. Nearly all of WeDevote's users are from mainland China, where government officials recently made it more difficult to purchase physical copies of the Bible. Officially, the Bible in China may be sold only at government-sanctioned Three-Self churches.

But while WeDevote co-founder Levi Fan may have been proud of the 10 millionth download on July 6, the celebration was short-lived. Within a week, Communist censors had blocked Chinese access to WeDevote's website and scrubbed the app from most domestic app stores.

This is an issue not just with apps but all social media in China. To resist the state is to risk harsh penalties - just as with trying to work around the suppression and strangulation of news from the outside. All of this are marks of a tyrannical government. But good news needs to be heard.

What does this have to do with Christmas? At its heart, Christmas is about news of what God has done, news of a birth. This is why the angels outside of Bethlehem shouted of “joy to the world” for “the Lord has come.” It is the news of the kingdom. And it is news that speaks to and addresses our deepest longings. The news of Christmas meets our deepest longings. Which means we need to give it a hearing. And Isaiah spoke to this centuries before Jesus' arrival.

What do we hear as this news is pronounced? Our text tells us three things. First, you are not forsaken. Second, you will flourish again. Third, all because of the Lord's faithfulness.

I. YOU ARE NOT FORSAKEN

First, despite how you may feel, despite what you actually deserve, you are not forsaken.

A) What They Assumed

Understand that Isaiah's audience assumed the worst. And understandably so.

1. What they had done

Consider what they had done. They had received so much from the Lord. And their response? A cold formalism towards Him. And a flat aloofness towards the needs of one another.

2. What they deserved

So what did they deserve? They were meant to be a light to the nations, a blessing. But they had proven to be a curse. Which would mean a cleansing and purging through invasion and exile.

B) How the Lord Spoke

But that was not to be the end. Hear how the Lord spoke (**READ Isaiah 44:1-2**).

1. The opening words

These opening words are magnificent. “But now...” meaning a shift, a change was coming. The necessary judgment and purifying would not be the last word. Truly, the most amazing news.

2. The sweet reminders

And these sweet reminders. Twice, the Lord refers to Israel as “my servant,” a position of honor and trust. And then, Jeshurun (“upright one”), with loving irony of what they were meant to be.

My people, you are not forsaken. My purposes will be accomplished even still.

Application:

That’s part of the news of Christmas. Whatever else you may think, you are not forsaken (**READ Isaiah 55:6-9**). There’s so much noise during the holidays - outside and inside. Some of that is harmful and needs to be drowned out. How? Turn up the volume on the voice of Jesus.

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II. YOU WILL FLOURISH AGAIN

You are not forsaken. And you will flourish again. Isaiah’s words are so good here.

A) Divine Transformation

Using imagery everyone would have known, he promises a divine transformation.

1. An end to the drought

(**READ Isaiah 44:3**) An end to the drought. Dried ground and crops were stuff of nightmares. What is this about? Not their fields but their hearts. They were the thirsty land and dry ground.

2. New life within

And a pouring down from heaven was coming, new life within, through the pouring of the Spirit.

B) Promised Expansion

A transformation. And, through that, the promised expansion (**READ Isaiah 44:4-5**).

1. Wondrous multiplication

This is who and what they were meant to be, God’s grace flowing in and through them (**READ Isaiah 25:6-9**). Israel would taste and see of the Lord’s goodness. And others would as well.

2. Gladdened identification

So much so that, as this multiplication was expanding, testimonies would be given, one leading to another, of lives being given over to and gladdened belonging to the Lord and His people.

This was a stunning turnaround. Darkness and death giving way to abundant life.

Application:

Absolutely miraculous. And the Lord is still doing this all around us all the time. No few of us here could give glad testimonies to that, it being the first thing that comes to your mind. “This is where I was. And this is where I am.” That is nothing less than revival. Something we need to be praying for all the time - water on the thirsty land and streams on the dry ground.

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III. BECAUSE OF GOD’S FAITHFUL LOVE

You are not forsaken. You will flourish again. But how can this be? There is only one way we can be assured of this. How? Only by of the Lord’s faithful love (**READ Isaiah 44:1-2**).

A) Promises Made Long Before

Listen to these promises made long long ago and the deep assurances they bring.

1. Sovereign decision

“You were chosen. This was a sovereign decision rooted in my unconditional love.”

2. The Lord’s creative power

“You were made, brought into existence as a people, for my own irreversible purposes.”

3. The Lord’s tender affection

“I formed you. Even while you were in the womb as a people, my heart was set upon you.”

B) And Now Finally Fulfilled

These were promises made long long before. And now finally fulfilled in Jesus.

1. Our thirst quenched

This is not the last time in the Bible mention is made of our thirst. Fast forward a few centuries (**READ John 7:37-38**). This all echoes His words to the woman at the well (**READ 4:13-14**).

2. By the Thirsty One

So our thirst will be quenched. But how? Can Jesus just wave a wand? No, it comes by His entering this world, our plight and our thirst, and becoming the Thirsty One (**READ John 19:28**).

Ah, Jeshurun, you need to hear this. Hear and take it to heart. And then fear no more.

Application:

Such is the Lord’s faithful love for us. “His steadfast love endures forever” - the best carol we could sing this Christmas! All His promises are “yes” in Jesus. Ours is a storehouse of riches. Forgiveness of and freedom from sin. Strength in weakness, mercy in trials. Our prayers heard. Nothing in vain. No tears lost. Always with us and for us. All things to be made new.

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CONCLUSION:

You may know of a cultural phenomenon that began in November 2010 with a TV movie on the Hallmark Channel called “A Family Thanksgiving.” And now, 232 movies later, we have the “Countdown to Christmas.” None of these films has won an award. But they pull in millions of viewers and tremendous ad revenue. So I doubt the folks at Hallmark are complaining.

What's behind this? These are the most-viewed non-sports and news shows on cable TV right now. What's the draw? Much of it has to do with a longing tapped. A longing for our wounds to be healed, hearts to be mended, problems to be solved, for all that is sad to come untrue. And it does, at least for a little while on the screen. So, quite understandably, millions tune in for the escape, the refuge, the glimpse into another world. Because that's what we want.

But what if there was more to these specials and their plot lines than we think? What if what we are really searching for is not a vague and undefined spirit of Christmas but the gospel of Christmas? You see, it's just possible these Hallmark movies might be telling us something.

They're pointing us to another story, a bigger and better story, the news of Christmas - news that meets our very deepest longings. Which means we really need to give it a hearing.

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