

NAZARENE BIBLE COLLEGE
CHAPEL MESSAGE
DECEMBER 13, 2006

I. Foundation

- A. Title: Castaway's Christmas
- B. Audience: Nazarene Bible College Students
- C. Text: Zephaniah 3:14-17

Sing, O Daughter of Zion; shout aloud, O Israel!
Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O Daughter of Jerusalem!
The Lord has taken away your punishment, he has turned back your enemy.
The Lord, the King of Israel, is with you; never again will you fear any harm.
On that day they will say to Jerusalem,
"Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands hang limp.
The Lord your God is with you, he is mighty to save.
He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love,
he will rejoice over you with singing.

- D. Central Truth: The message of Christmas is that even in the circumstances of life when we are cast away from any sense, presence, or evidence of the activity of God, he loves and actively works for the redemption of those who will humbly and steadfastly hold to his truth and Lordship, and in this is found true joy.

E. Listener Needs

1. To personally experience the presence of "Immanuel" and to live out the joy of his redeeming love in the "castaway" moments of life
2. To take up the prophetic mission of proclaiming to all "castaways" that Jesus has come, God is with us, he is the fountain of divine love's overwhelming joy

F. Message Aims

1. Cognitive: to understand the grace of God that is available through Immanuel in castaway moments and experiences of life
2. Affective: to have a genuine experience of joy as a castaway redeemed through the love of God expressed in Immanuel
3. Behavioral: to respond to castaway moments and experiences with humble submission to the truth and lordship of God and faith in his loving presence, and to join with the great Christmas prophetic tradition in proclaiming this truth to other castaways

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II. Message Outline

A. Introduction

1. Video Clip: "Castaways Christmas" – Gilligan's Island
2. Application:
 - a. This clip illustrates one of the traditional elements that we associate with the Advent season and celebration: JOY!
 - b. Christmas is a time to experience joy, and who could imagine experiencing more joy than helpless stranded castaways on a deserted island learning that they are soon to be rescued so they can return home.

B. Exposition

1. Our Advent reading for today from the book of Zephaniah is a reminder that we too are all castaways, and, as such, the message and experience of Christmas holds a unique promise of abundant joy for our lives.
2. To understand this message of joy, we must first understand Zephaniah's prophecy. For this book is very much written to castaways.
 - a. Zephaniah ministered during the reign of King Josiah.
 - b. By this time, the Assyrians had destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel, and its ten tribes were lost forever.
 - c. Previous to the time of Zephaniah's writing, the southern kingdom had enjoyed the blessings of the reign of Hezekiah who reestablished the worship of the true God, only to be followed by the devastating reigns of Mannaseh and Amon, who systematically and ruthlessly reversed all the positive spiritual and social reforms instituted under Hezekiah.
 - d. Amidst the great social and religious unrest that followed Amon's assassination, the nation was put under the rule of the eight-year-old Josiah.
 - e. In the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign, the book of the law was discovered, the temple was purified, and true religious practice was reestablished. However, Jewish culture was still marked by extreme covetousness, corruption, and cruelty.
 - f. During this time, hope for the restoration of national independence had begun to rise as Assyrian domination began to wane, only to be dashed by marauding bands of roving bandits who terrorized and ravaged the land.
3. Do you get the sense that if you had been living in these times you may have been feeling a bit shipwrecked? Slowly, bit by bit, cultural, moral, political, and spiritual typhoons were destroying the ship beneath the feet of the people, robbing them of their security, their hope, and all that had identified them as a unique and blessed people. Relentlessly, these storms were driving them further and further off the course of their calling and destiny, further and further from the God who was their life. Zephaniah tells us that many had come to the point of believing that God was at worst a myth and at best irrelevant to life, thinking in their hearts "The Lord will do nothing, either good or bad."

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4. It was within these tumultuous circumstances and to these storm-tossed people that Zephaniah spoke, and his basic message was “All Is Lost! Abandon Ship!” Now isn’t that a joyful Christmas message.
 - a. Zephaniah is unique among the prophets in that there is no call to repentance in order to stave off the impending wrath of God.
 - b. The die is already cast. The path is set. There is no turning back. The ship is beyond repair.
 - c. The present white-capped seas are but a minute reflection of the tsunami of God’s wrath that looms upon the horizon.
 - d. The day of the Lord has already been established, and it will rush in with a wave of destruction that will “sweep away everything from the face of the earth.” (1:2)
 - e. The hand of the Lord is stretched out, and it cannot be drawn back.
 - f. Tragedy cannot be avoided. All on board must be cast into the blackened seas.
 - g. I bet that’s the most joyous Christmas message you have ever heard.
5. Ah! But this is not the end of the words God speaks through Zephaniah. There is one recourse for the shipwrecked, one plank of debris to which they may cling. The only hope is to “Seek the Lord...seek righteousness...seek humility.” There will be no sparing the storm, but perhaps in seeking God “you may be sheltered” from the complete destruction of his anger. (2:3) Your ship will be lost, but God may yet pluck you from the deeps to place you on some deserted island. To those who seek the Lord, these faithful castaways, God speaks through the prophet the following words you have before you.
 - a. Sing, O Daughter of Zion; shout aloud, O Israel!
Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O Daughter of Jerusalem!
The Lord has taken away your punishment, he has turned back your enemy.
The Lord, the King of Israel, is with you; never again will you fear any harm.
On that day they will say to Jerusalem,
"Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands hang limp.
The Lord your God is with you, he is mighty to save.
He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love,
he will rejoice over you with singing." (NIV)
 - b. This is the hope of the shipwrecked, the promise of the castaways. This is the fire that reignites joy, gladness, and singing in the hearts of those set adrift by the wrath of God: The Lord Your God, “Immanuel,” is with you.
 - c. The raging racket of his wrath has now become the quiet communions of his delight and love.
 - d. Notice the duet of joy that occurs in this passage of hope. As the joy of God’s presence leads the castaways to shout the chorus of gladness, God joins in the refrain as he finds joy in them.
 - e. What a message of grace for Advent, that a holy, awesome, inapproachable God, should so delight in a humble castaway as to take upon himself my flesh and walk with me through the shipwreck experiences of my life until our hearts are knitted together in a symphony of joyous love.

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C. Illustration

1. However, we live in a skeptical world much like Zephaniah's own. We are tempted to think as the people to whom he spoke, God is irrelevant to the circumstances of my life. "The Lord will do nothing, either good or bad." In the deepest recesses of our hearts we question, "Is such a joy truly possible when all of life around me is shipwrecked?" "Is there really such an Immanuel who loves me enough to search all the emotional, social, physical, and spiritual desert islands to find one castaway?" "Is such a love between castaway and God that would raise a ravaged heart to the greatest heights of joy a genuine possibility?"
2. To answer the skeptics within even the most hardened castaway, I want to share with you the story of the poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.
 - a. Longfellow wrote the poem "Christmas Bells" on December 25, 1864.
 - b. At this time, most Americans were in deep despair over the Civil War. Both sides had entered this war believing it would be easily won in a matter of months. However, it had now dragged on for three-and-one-half years requiring unimaginable pain and sacrifice from both North and South, and resulting in more war dead and wounded than any other conflict before or after.
 - c. Two years prior to this, Longfellow's wife had died in their own house when her dress caught fire. The poet, himself, suffered severe burns to his arms, torso, and face when he tried to extinguish the flames by covering her with his own body.
 - d. Just three weeks prior to the writing of this poem, Longfellow's son was critically wounded on the battlefield when a bullet ripped through his back, causing damage to two vertebrae. He still had no assurance that his son would either survive the wound or be an invalid if he did live.
 - e. Surely, Longfellow must have felt like a castaway, swept away in a torrent of tragedies as he penned the following words.

I heard the bells on Christmas day, their old familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet the words repeat of peace on earth, good will to men.

I thought how, as the day had come, the belfries of all Christendom
Had rolled along the unbroken song of peace on earth, good will to men.

Till ringing, singing, on it's way, the world revolved from night to day,
A voice, a chime, a chant sublime of peace on earth, good will to men.

Then from each black, accursed mouth the cannon thundered in the south,
And with the sound the carols drowned, of peace on earth good will to men.

It was as if an earthquake rent the hearthstones of a continent
And made forlorn the households born of peace on earth good will to men.

And in despair I bowed my head, "There is no peace on earth," I said,
For hate is strong and mocks the song of peace on earth, good will to men.

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- f. I can't imagine that any Christmas carol could have more truly or more fully expressed the heart of a castaway. It would be no stretch to hear Zephaniah, himself, proclaiming these words on the streets of Jerusalem to its soon to be shipwrecked citizens.
- g. However, likewise true to our prophet's message, the story does not end here, nor does the carol. Sitting at his desk, wrapped in the despair of his heartache, Longfellow continues his Christmas poem with the following verse.

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:

God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;

The wrong shall fail, the right prevail

With peace on earth, good will to men.

- h. Is joy truly possible when all of life around me is shipwrecked? Longfellow's unshakable personal testimony is "Yes!" Is there really such an Immanuel who loves me enough to search all the emotional, social, physical, and spiritual desert islands to find one castaway? The overwhelming witness of this poet castaway is "Yes!" "Is it a genuine possibility that there should be such a love between castaway and God that a ravaged heart could be raised to the greatest heights of joy? The glorious song of this heart rings eternally "Yes!"

D. Application

- 1. What then of you and me? Where do these two Castaway's Christmas Carols fit with our Advent celebrations?
 - a. First, these two carols call each of us to a genuine personal experience of Immanuel, God with us, that we may remain steadfast and be delivered in the midst of the castaway moments of life, and that we may experience the heavenly joys that only those rescued by divine love after shipwreck can know.
 - b. Second, we are challenged by these two carols to pick up the prophetic mission and to proclaim the Advent promise to all castaways that Immanuel has come, God is with us. Our hope lies not in clinging to the collapsing remnants of cursed and corrupted world. Instead promise lies in seeking and finding overflowing joy in the presence of divine love amidst life's wreckage.
 - c. We all will find ourselves shipwrecked upon deserted islands at times throughout our lives. We all are castaway casualties of the war between sin and righteousness. Yet, we are all also objects of God's ever-present love in Jesus, and we are heirs of the hope and promise of God's heavenly joy.
 - d. Advent is a divine opportunity not only to celebrate these divine blessings of his presence in our lives, but also to renew again our commitments to seek Immanuel and to proclaim him to castaways everywhere.
 - e. As fellow castaways, will you join me in a corporate "Amen" to the promises and prophetic call of God through the singing of these carols?

I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day

Joy to the World

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