

Christmas At Redeemer

O'Come, O'Come Emmanuel

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Well, hello. Merry Christmas.

Merry Christmas.

Or as Pastor Daryl likes to say, "Christmas," right? It's so good to see regular faces and new faces and even faces that I haven't seen in a while. Merry Christmas. I'm John. If you're a guest, I'm one of the pastors here. Thank you for being here. Thank you, if you're watching online. And a special thank you to all of you sitting in our ministry center right now, to make room for all of us in here.

I want to ask you, do you have a favorite Christmas song? Is there one that for you, stands out from the rest as, this one is the best? I have one that I hate. It goes like this. I want a hippopotamus... I hate that song. Absolutely hate it. And so there's a lady here in the first service today, who was here last night who said, "Since you've said that, it's been stuck in my head all night and this morning." I said, "You're welcome."

For me though, when it comes to favorites, it's a two song race between, O Holy Night and one we just sang a few minutes ago, O Come, O Come Emmanuel. That song is over a thousand years old. Did you know that? Sung by medieval monks in the weeks leading up to Christmas. Those weeks are called Advent, coming from a Latin word meaning arrival, namely the arrival of Jesus.

The original has seven stanza and monks would sing a verse a day, to prepare their hearts and their minds for Christmas. Interestingly, the haunting melody that people love so much is actually a funeral song sung by French, sung by French nuns, from the 1400s.

Now, while who wrote this song has been lost to history, the English version that we sing was translated from the Latin original in the mid-1800s. The man who translated it is named John Mason Neale. He was an Anglican priest who couldn't preach. He contracted a lung disease and so instead he spent his life leading a college, starting multiple organizations to help the sick to help orphans and to help young women. And in his free time, he like you, translated old Greek and Latin hymns into English. So, he focused on songs that were sung during the Christmas holidays, really the Christian holidays, because he wanted to enrich the worship that took place on those days, and that's why we have, O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.

Well, let's consider the first stanza of the song together. Pay careful attention to each word.

O come, O Come, Emmanuel and ransom captive Israel, that mourns in lonely exile here, until the Son of God appears.

700 years before Jesus was born, a prophet named Isaiah wrote that a virgin would conceive, she would carry a son, and this son would be a special kind of person. He would be Emmanuel, which means God with us.

Now, why was there a need for God to be with us? Well, Israel was captive. God's people were enslaved and they needed to be ransomed. They needed to be set free from their captivity. Now this refers to an historical event, the destruction of the Jews, their land, their cities, their temple, and their enslavement by the Babylonians in the early 500s BC.

One of the texts that our song gets its inspiration from is Isaiah 59:20, written to the Jews who would be exiled in Babylon, which starts like this. "A redeemer, a rescuer, savior, will come to Zion." Or better based on the context, "A redeemer will come for Zion. He will come for God's people. Come to rescue. Come to save."

It's a promise made by God himself to his people. A ray of hope shining into their dark world, even though they were suffering at that moment. Stay faithful, stay true, believe God's word, and one day His promise will be fulfilled. Emmanuel will arrive and He will save. The mourning, the loneliness, the captivity, the exile that we sang about all will end when? When the Son of God appears to ransom, to rescue. God promised this and God would be the one to do it, and He would do it for his people and He would do it through Emmanuel.

Well, God did rescue his people from their enemies and fast forward 700 years from Isaiah's prediction to the book of Matthew, the first book of the New Testament. He describes the significance of Jesus' birth with these words. Matthew 1:22. "All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet Isaiah." In other words, the promise was literally fulfilled that first Christmas day when Jesus was born. Emmanuel God with us, meaning this. Jesus is God coming to us.

Now, why would he need to come to us? The previous verse, Matthew 1:21 tells us, it says that Joseph was told to, "Call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." You see, the captivity that we just sang about is not just in Babylon, but it is enslavement to sin. The mourning, the loneliness, the exile, the separation, is between us and God because of our sin.

Well, what should we do about this? Does that really matter for you and me today? It sure does. It infinitely matters for you and for me. From the first Advent, the first arrival, God coming to us, when Jesus was born, that first Christmas day in the city of Bethlehem over 2000 years ago. We turn next to a second arrival, only this time it's us coming to Jesus. And for this, I'll keep you in Matthew, but in Matthew 11:28. One of the truly beautiful texts in all the Bible on God's heart, his love for people who've sinned against him.

Jesus speaking about the many people who really didn't care about him, who didn't really want anything to do with him. He gives them a ray of hope. Hope for for all those who would turn from their apathy, turn from their rebellion. He says to them, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Those who labor are people who are weary, exhausted from struggling, from toiling, from striving. And those who are heavy laden are people who are burdened, who are carrying a load that that's just too heavy for them to bear. The people he's

describing here are troubled. They're beaten down, not just by life, but specifically by their sin. Their work to make themselves right with God is just never enough. All the personal standards, all the religious demands, there's just too much. The burden they carry of their sin is never lifted. The burden they carry to unburden themselves of their sin is also never lifted. Now, they can distract themselves. They can try to justify themselves, but the burden never really goes away. There's a weight on their hearts. There's a burden on their souls, that they can't really ignore. Their mourning and lonely exile from God because of their sins, and there's a desperate need for one to come to appear to ransom them, to set them free from their captivity to sin. For them, the weary, for the heavily burdened, Jesus promised rest.

He promises to lift the burden off of their souls forever. He promises to revive them, replacing their weary exhaustion with peace, when their sins are forgiven. Rest for the weary soul. That's true comfort and joy for the burden, that you can be ransomed. You can be set free. Your mourning replaced with rejoicing. Your exile, your separation from God, replaced with adoption into his family. Your soul will rest. Your conscience will rest. Your heart will be at peace. No more work to be done. No more hoops to jump through. No more hamster wheel. No more hopeless finger crossing that you're good enough and that you've done enough to avoid hell. All of that, replaced forever, with rest. And all of that for those who come to Jesus.

He said, "Remember, come to me all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Not come to a church. Not come to an organization. Not come to a theology. Not come to some activity. Not come to somebody else to come to me. But what? "Come to me," Jesus said.

And listen to the weary and burdened, He does not say, "Come to yourself and you'll give yourself rest." No, the burden, the exhaustion is because of what? It's because of our sin and because of our utter inability to cleanse ourselves, to free ourselves from our sin. No, there's no prophet needed, no co-ed redeemer, no intermediary, no negotiator. Jesus says, "Come right to me." Spiritual rest. Rest from all of your sins, comes to those who come to Jesus. Who believe in him. Who trust in him. Who give their lives to him. And when they do, he ransoms. He sets free, all those who are held captive by their sin and in need of rest.

Hypocrites won't come to Jesus because they're drunk on their own good works and they're drunk on their own good ideas about themselves. Those who love this world won't come to Jesus because loving this world has blinded them to any real concern about their eternal souls.

But to all who are exhausted by trying to be good enough to go to heaven, by all who are weary from running away from God, from the truth that they know, from all who are heavily burdened by their sin and the hopelessness of religion, to all people everywhere without exception, all ages, all personalities, all ethnicities, all backgrounds, leaving nobody out, He says, "Come, Come to me. Believe in me and I will give you rest for your soul." No work to do. Nothing to earn. No hoops to jump through. Nothing at all to achieve. Just come.

So, have you come to Jesus. I know you're here celebrating his birth, but could you say no pretense, no doubting in the depths of your soul. Could you say that you've come to Jesus, you believe in him, you trust in him to set you free from the hell your sins deserve?

Well, how would you know if you'd have? Well, has the burden of your sin been lifted? Has the burden of trying to be good enough for God to accept you, while never really knowing if you're good enough, has that been replaced with a deep and lasting rest?

If not, do you want that? Do you know you need this rest? Then come. Come. But you say, "I'm too old." Nobody is too old for Christ. Come to him. You say, "I'm too young." No. Jesus told the little children to come to Him, so you can too. Come to Christ. You say, "It's too soon. I want the pleasures of sin first." No. Jesus called that foolish in Luke 12:20 because you have no guarantee that you will see tomorrow, so come to Christ today. You say, "I'm too wicked." No, you're not. Luke 6:37, Jesus himself says, "All who come to me, I will never push away." You say, "What will people think?" No. You should ask, "What would God think if I reject his son?" Come to Christ. You say, "I'm too good. I don't need it." No. There is no one good but God alone. Be done with that lie and come to Christ, an eternal rest will be yours today. If you have any questions, any concerns, God is working in your heart right now, come talk to me. I'll be right over there before you leave. Do not go home without forgiveness for all of your sins and the rest that that will bring you.

Now, for all who do come to Jesus, this rest is not just immediate and it's not just permanent, and it's not just truly satisfying, but this rest comes with another promise. You see, from the first Advent, the first arrival, God coming to us when Jesus was born, that first Christmas, to a second arrival, us coming to Jesus for rest from our sins, there is also a third arrival, a second Advent for Jesus. And that happens when he comes back. Jesus said, second and last verse in the Bible. Revelation 22:20. Jesus says, "Surely I am coming soon." He told his followers on the night He was betrayed. John 14:3. "I will come again and will take you to myself that where I am, you may also be." The angel that met Jesus followers after Jesus went back to heaven, made this declaration. Acts 1:11, that quote this. "Jesus will come back." There's inevitability about this. There's an assurance to these words which echoes the assurance that we heard from Jesus.

Again, Revelation 22:20 when he says, "Surely," meaning certainly, indeed, truly. It is a fact, that I'm coming soon. Actually, Jesus says this three times in the last chapter of the Bible, just in case we miss it the first two. "I am coming soon." And that word, that phrase means this. I can show up. I can return at any moment. Has nothing to do with a short amount of time. It's imminent. I could come back at any moment. Now though this promise was almost 2,000 years old, with each passing day, its fulfillment gets closer and closer, until one day what you believe about Jesus, you will see, either at your death or when he returns. And so we echo the prayer of the redeemed at the end of Revelation 22:20, which says in response to the certainty that Jesus will return, we say, "Amen. Amen. Come Lord Jesus." Amen, meaning we believe. Your people, we trust you that your promise to return will come to pass, so come Lord Jesus, is our sincere desire, our heartfelt urgency, our deep longing, our eager prayer for Jesus to come back and to come back soon.

For those who enjoy his rest, their souls yearn for him to come back. Question. Does yours? Interestingly, in the Latin original of O Come, O Come Emmanuel, each name for Jesus in the

seven stanzas creates an acrostic all the way down. But the interesting thing is the acrostic means nothing when you read it going forward. But when you read it going backwards, it spells a Latin phrase, *Ero Cras*, which means, I will be with you tomorrow.

Why? Because it's easy to sing the hymn and think of the past. Think of rescue for sin. But the acrostic, going back the other direction suggests that we should read this song, that we should sing this song with the future in mind as well. You see, God's work to save sinners remains incomplete to this day. Why? Because we mourn in lonely exile here, until the Son of God appears, that is until the day Jesus comes back and our mourning is replaced with rejoicing.

So let's return to our song. O Come, O Come Emmanuel and ransom captive Israel that mourns in lonely exile here, until the Son of God appears. When you put it all together, whenever we sing this song, we're singing the heart of the Jews who are captives in Babylon, longing for God, their redeemer, to come and rescue them. But we're also singing the heart of all sinners, weary and burdened, mourning because we're held captive by our sin and need one to come rescue us and give us rest. But we're also singing the heart of all the redeemed, who mourn in lonely exile here away from our savior, away from our true home, waiting for Emmanuel, for the son of God to appear when He comes back and rescues us from this dark world and establishes who rules the world with truths, truth and grace, when He returns.

If you wondered why this song's been sung by Christians for over a thousand years, this is why. It brilliantly combines the experience of God's people, past, present, and future. It connects us here today with Israelites 2,500 years ago. It connects us here today with medieval monks a thousand years ago. And it connects us here today with the redeemed in the future, who will continue to sing,

Come Lord Jesus. Amen. We are seeing through the eyes, when we sing this song, of those who longed for the first Advent, those who are grateful for the first Advent because of sins forgiven, and eternal life, and eternal rest given to those who trust in Christ. And we sing as those who long for the second Advent, when Christ returns.

See, Jesus' first coming is the most significant event in history. His second coming is the most significant event yet to happen in history. And if you think about it, sinners coming to Him for rest from their sin is the most significant event that can happen in your personal history. All of that, summed up in the haunting and yet incredibly hopeful, O Come, O Come, Emmanuel. Let's pray.

Jesus, that is one brilliant song about you, but that is because you are one infinitely wonderful Savior. We celebrate Christmas, we give gifts to each other, but every gift that we give is a picture of your Father giving You as a gift to the world. Not to live a life that we can look at and say, "Wow, he's great." Not because of your teachings, but because you came here to die for sinners, to take the punishment that we deserve for our sins on the cross, and raise from the dead to prove that you accomplished that work. That all who trust in You, all who believe in You, who come to You, will receive eternal life.

For many of us here and watching online, this gift is the greatest gift that we've ever received, and it's not just every Christmas, it's every day. It's every week. We worship you. We honor you because of what you've done. But there are many within the sound of my voice, who keep pushing that gift back. Who keep resisting. Who keep justifying. Who know the truth and yet continue to push it away.

Jesus, help them see that You are more wonderful, You are more incredible, You are more satisfying than anything they could possibly hold onto, instead of You. May today be the day, they open this gift and receive you the King of Kings. It's in your name I pray. Amen.