


Jeremiah 20:7-13

December 24, 2008 – CHRISTMAS EVE

LET CHRISTMAS CAROLS RING!

 **In praise of the LORD**
 **For His glorious rescue**

In the name of Jesus Christ, our newborn Savior and King, dear rejoicing Christians:

Isn't that an unlikely place to find a Savior – lying in a manger? And what an unlikely place to find the Son of God! Some might think these words of Jeremiah make an unlikely Christmas Eve text. But this year listening to the radio or TV it fits. As a pastor with the privilege of cheering and comforting God's people, I find it super stranger how others try to celebrate "the Holidays." Was it "Twenty Reasons to Celebrate This Year," one newspaper wrote? Among items meant to help readers be more positive were "unweaving the weave" of our freeway system, some of our local athletes might go to state, the bad economy gives people more time to play in the snow. Thankful is great, but where was God in that?

Last Sunday we were privileged to see Christmas through Isaiah's eyes in our Children's Christmas Service. Tonight and tomorrow morning we see Christmas through Jeremiah's eyes which is especially fitting this year because Jeremiah's eyes were usually filled with tears. Only once in fifty-two chapters Jeremiah says, "*Sing!*" "*Sing to the LORD! Give praise to the LORD! He rescues the life of the needy from the hands of the wicked.*" On this night **Let Christmas Carols Ring...**

 **In praise of the LORD**

Given a choice, it's safe to say Jeremiah would rather have been with the shepherds outside of Bethlehem than living in the capital city of Jerusalem six centuries before Christ. He actually tried to leave the city and was arrested for going over to the enemy. But he just wanted to see some property he had bought. Can you imagine getting arrested on the highway to Grandma's house because the town mayor didn't like you? How about if the police were obeying orders from top church officials to have you beaten publicly and put in stocks overnight? Can we still **praise the LORD** for our freedom?

You know how it is this time of year when people remember Christmases past and loved ones lost. Throw in some personal and national troubles and we want to argue with God the way Jeremiah does: "*O Lord, you deceived me, and I was deceived; you overpowered me and prevailed. I am ridiculed all day long; everyone mocks me.*" Don't you feel that way sometimes even saying, "Merry Christmas"? I do it anyway. But why are some folks so deeply offended? Do we all have to despair together? Or should those of us who know the Christ of Christmas try to cheer up the rest and share this Good News?

Jeremiah tried, but this is how it felt: "*Whenever I speak, I cry out proclaiming violence and destruction. So the word of the LORD has brought me insult and reproach all day long. But if I say, 'I will not mention him or speak any more in his name,' his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot. I hear many whispering, 'Terror on every side! Report him! Let's report him!' All my friends are waiting for me to slip, saying, 'Perhaps he will be deceived; then we will prevail over him and take our revenge on him.'*"

Do your friends sometimes treat you that way? They will if you try to tell them why they need the hope inside you. We first need to see our sin before we can appreciate our Savior. We first need to admit our poverty before God before appreciate the true riches that He brings us in the Christ Child.

Mary and Joseph could certainly feel their poverty. Such a long journey on foot from Nazareth to Bethlehem, only to find there was no room for them in the inn. God's Word brought them hardship and difficulty that first Christmas when Jesus was born. In the months that followed they had to flee with God's newborn Son to Egypt in order to escape the sword of jealous King Herod.

Christmas will be a hard time in families where some openly reject God's Son as Lord and Savior. But we ought not sin by giving up or going silent. Jeremiah would dry his eyes and call to us here and now: **Let Christmas Carols Ring! In praise of the LORD.** In spite of the fact that war had come to their country and God promised absolute defeat, death and captivity, Jeremiah could **praise the LORD** like this: *"The LORD is with me like a mighty warrior; so my persecutors will stumble and not prevail. They will fail and be thoroughly disgraced; their dishonor will never be forgotten."*

Life on earth is one thing. Life in heaven is just the opposite. Can you see it in the Christmas story? Who gets to be the mother of our Lord? A lowly virgin, surprised by God's grace and blessing. Who gets to be His stepfather? A righteous bachelor who thought he had to divorce his fiancée for infidelity, but found out from the angel that she was the mother of God's own Son. Who were called as the first witnesses of Christmas to come and see, then go and tell? Lowly shepherds who thought that night would be like every other. And whom does God call today? One and all, great and small, come to the manger bed of Christ the Lord. **Let Carols Ring** in His holy praise. **Let Christmas Carols Ring...**

For His glorious rescue

What if your Christmas cards came with pictures of babies, but no names, no return address, no way to identify whose baby is that? In some cases moms and grandmas could figure it out by noses, eyes and foreheads, but the rest of us would have no clue who they were unless someone told us.

God was so intent on helping us celebrate **His glorious rescue** this and every Christmas that He sent postcards and emails and articles for centuries ahead of His tiny Child coming with a **glorious rescue** for fallen mankind. Every rescue we seem to imagine these days is about the weather or the economy. Some think that rescue from depression can only be found in a bottle or some illegal substance. Who dares suggest there might be **rescue** for eternal joy in heaven with God where there is no more weeping or sorrow or crying or pain? Who dares suggest a total **glorious rescue** from death itself?

But that is what God was promising in all those birth announcements leading up to Christmas. One hundred years before Jeremiah, another prophet named Isaiah foretold: *"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."* (Isaiah 9:6 NIV) Jeremiah could see Him coming even through his tears. A few chapters after our text the Holy Spirit spoke again through His weeping prophet: *"The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord Our Righteousness."* (23:5f NIV)

Why do we get so hung up on the unlikelihood of Christmas? Would you stop a sweepstakes team at the edge of your driveway? I can just hear you, "No! No! It's too unlikely." Have Americans stopped supporting casinos because it's so unlikely? Do unlikely statistics halt the purchase of lottery tickets?

In that unlikely place I find Him as they said: Sweet newborn Babe, how frail! and in a manger bed, A still, small voice to cry one day for me, A still small voice to cry one day for me. (CW 54:2)

Unlikely it is, and so unlikely that no human being would have conceived such a plan. But **"God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross."** (Colossians 1:19f NIV) Yes, this Baby Jesus was born to live and die and live again for me. And not alone for me, but as your Savior too, the Savior of the world. **Let Christmas Carols Ring** to Christ our King – **For his glorious rescue** from depression and fear, guilt and shame, yes, **rescue** for God's helping wisdom here and glorious joy hereafter in heaven.

Dry your tears, Jeremiah. It's Christmas with Christ the Lord! Amen.