

“The Zeal of the LORD Almighty Will Accomplish This”

- ✦ eternal love
- ✦ awesome power
- ✦ steadfast determination

From him who is and who was and who is to come, the Lord Almighty, greetings in our newborn Jesus:

This Christmas reminds me of something the Lord’s Apostle Paul said to the Christians in Corinth: **“What do you have that you did not receive.”** (1 Corinthians 4:7 NIV84) Our congregation has been so richly blessed in the last year with God’s Word and sacraments, but also the music, our musicians, and new instruments to sing sweet heavenly music into our souls. But how about the technology that brought a story my way from the Pastor Jonathan Schroeder¹ who supplies our beautiful Christmas post card invitations every year? It takes us back to a time before God’s gift of GPS, even before the Arctic and North Pole were mapped. That huge area was blank on world maps, but the US Navy was determined to fill in the routes of the ocean currents across the top of the globe.

Would you sign up for duty on the *USS Jeanette*? Here’s the plan: You guys sail farther north than anyone on record, get yourselves frozen in the ice cap, then drift across the North Pole until you reach open water again. Sure! When the ice releases you, you can sail right on home. Should take 2-3 years. Back in the 1870’s, everyone wanted to know what was up there – like *Star Trek...the last frontier*. With no satellite coverage, forget about Christmas cards of any kind. Talk about cut off from everything! Almost like the Son of God coming down from heaven to a life of poverty, misery and death down here!

The cause of personal glory put sailors on the icecap aboard the *USS Jeanette*. But what could cause the Lord’s Christ to come down from heaven to earth? You can start with...

✦ eternal love

As so often happens, there was a major flaw in the plan to map the Arctic ice floes. And you can’t blame the government, because the funding came as a private enterprise from the man who bought the ice breaker after it was sold by the British Navy. Everything seemed to be fine for twenty-one months until June 12, 1881.² “Man the pumps!” Thousands of gallons of sea water were pouring in every minute. Now your one shelter, your only means of getting back alive is filling the bilge and breaking to pieces. Some of you can guess why. The ice was crushing *Jeanette*. No amount of caulking or nailing or binding pieces together could keep her afloat. Frozen...broken...shattered!

Have you ever made decisions that ended up distressing, disastrous, deadly? Maybe your brokenness came from circumstances no one could predict, trapping you between the jagged edges of life, crushing you. But what if you just try harder? Keep pumping away? Hope against hope? Care less about whatever? Maybe you can hold it all together long enough. But as the ice keeps crushing in, how long before you’re standing like sailors watching your only lifeline sink into the dreary depths?

Christmas cries, “You’re not alone! The God of **eternal love** only wants you to look up. Hear the angels echoing the prophets about the coming Christ: **“Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end....The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.”** Distress will die in His...

¹ Details: Christmas Eve sermon (Luke 2:11-14.) by Jonathan E. Schroeder, Faith, Sharpsburg, GA. Sides, Hampton. *In the Kingdom of Ice: The Grand and Terrible Polar Voyage of the USS Jeanette*, Kopft Doubleday. Kindle Ed. Used by permission.

² Dates vary. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_Jeanette_\(1878\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_Jeanette_(1878))

✦ awesome power

So what happened to the sailors from the *USS Jeanette*? They decided to walk out. They loaded all their supplies onto lifeboats and started pulling. Nearest land mass: 1,000 miles away in Siberia. That cold, frozen land of hopeless was now their only hope. How true to life for all of us on our own.

Even the coldest heart has to ache for those men. But never giving up, pressing on, pulling yourself up by the bootstraps – isn't that the American way? It's how so many try to walk out of their own misery. Forget about how you got here, just put one foot in front of the other and get going. Cross the open water in whatever boat you can drag along and rely on your teammates to get you through.

Maybe you're strong enough to walk on broken a few days, weeks, years. At least you're not like those hypocrites in the church who always seem to need a crutch. So you stay away and just keep trying.

But if you've been in church all your life, you may look in the mirror and wonder, "Am I one of them? Why am I still so impatient? I keep praying, but why do I still feel so broken?"

Can you see how we all suffer from the same delusion? It's like a mirage on the water that looks safe until you step on it. It's the age old idea promoted by all the world's religions that God helps those who help themselves. They claim God will reward the good people, as if there's no room for the broken ones. But the God of the Bible, the One who sent His Son to rescue us, calls out: "***Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD Almighty.***" (Zechariah 4:6 NIV84) Here again, "***The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.***" There's more here than meets the eye. Much more is needed than staying afloat. Otherwise, we're hopeless...trying to walk out of our brokenness alone. Scattered!

✦ steadfast determination

You have to admire their determination. But once the stranded crew finally reached Siberia, a violent storm sank one lifeboat, drowning eight. The other two boats made it to distant points, separated. Unfortunately, the Lena River Delta was marshy, half frozen, desolate. Captain Delong and his eleven froze and starved to death. Only the Chief Engineer George Melville and his group made it, but not by their own determination. A Yakut tribesman found them and led them to food, clothes and rescue.

They could not walk out of their own brokenness, my friends. Neither can we. **The Zeal of the LORD Almighty Will Accomplish This!** No determination of ours can make the trek from earth to heaven. It's not about our journey. It's all about how God came down from heaven to earth, not as a mighty king, but as a tiny infant. His coming was not announced to world governments, politicians, and Red Carpet celebrities. This was so important that heaven announced Christ's coming with angels lighting up the sky for lowly shepherds. "***Glory to God in the highest and peace***" to everyone in our broken world, every broken heart, every shattered life, every hopeless soul who could not plan well enough, try hard enough, or work long enough to rescue ourselves. God knew it and by **steadfast determination** He keeps looking for hurting hearts like ours to bring us home to shelter and rescue.

Is there room for you beside His manger? With empty hands? It's the only way to come so God can fill your hands, head and heart with priceless gifts from heaven. All treasured up in God's own Son, the greatest Gift of relief, repair and rescue that could only find us. "***Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.***" God's **justice** is what tells us we're in trouble – sinking ship, can't walk out, storms waiting if we try this on our own. God's **righteousness** is His gift when He sends the rescue ship after us, picturing Christ's church with Jesus Himself as our Captain, our Helmsman, our Judge. Don't let that startle you. You already know God's verdict. "***For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.***" (John 3:17 NIV84) Trust in God's Son. *Jesus* means *Savior*. He puts **justice** on our side. **The Zeal of the LORD Almighty** found you this Christmas. Stay warm and safe in Christ alone. Amen.

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