



-- Read Luke 4:42-44, 2:16-18

-- Pray

-- A Politically Correct Christmas Greeting

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year! Oh, wait, I can't say that, can I? Let me rephrase that...

Best wishes for an environmentally conscious, socially responsible, low stress, non-addictive, gender neutral, winter solstice holiday, practiced within the most joyous traditions of the religious persuasion of your choice, but with respect for the religious persuasions of others who choose to practice their own religion as well as those who choose not to practice any religion at all.

Additionally: Best wishes for a fiscally successful, personally fulfilling, and medically uncomplicated recognition of the generally accepted calendar year 2008, but not without due respect for the calendars of choice of other cultures whose contributions have helped make our society great, and without regard to the race, creed, color, or religious and/or sexual preferences of the wisher, the wisher, or the wishee.

*Disclaimer:* This greeting is subject to both clarification and withdrawal. It implies no promise by the wisher to implement in actuality any of the wishes for himself, herself, or others, and it entails no responsibility for any unintended emotional stress these greetings may bring to those with dispositions inconsonant with the holiday spirit.)

Or in other words

Isn't that the way it seems to go nowadays? We are told that we must tiptoe around Christmas and that we must, at all costs, avoid offending the handful of scrooges in the world that are so self-absorbed they can think of nothing better to do than drag everyone else into their holiday misery. They tell us to take our mangers off of public property and say "Happy Holidays" instead of "Merry Christmas" lest someone be offended that they might be forced to contemplate the majesty and wonder of the fact that the Son of God came to earth as a man, born of a virgin, lying in a manger, sent for the salvation of mankind. There can be no

doubt that certain elements of our culture appear determined abolish any Christmas sentiment that gives glory to God.

Thus, I praise God this morning that, as the song Holly sang says, “Christmas is in fact all in the heart.” I praise God that, in spite of all the chaos around us, we can still cultivate, contemplate, and communicate the matchless joy of Christmas, both in the depths of our spirits and in day-to-day conversation. Indeed, the thrust of the message this morning is to emphasize that a genuinely Christlike and biblically informed Christmas spirit is not politically correct. On the contrary, it is one that will joyfully “Go and tell it on the mountain that Jesus Christ is born!”

It is my Christmas prayer that, both as individuals and as a congregation, we will grow in a lifestyle characterized by the heavenly proclamation described in that wonderful Christmas carol. If we are to do so, we must understand three central truths about our calling in Christ. Before I get to the first of these three truths, let me say that, today, we will only have time to cover one-and-a half of them, and I will save the second half of this message for next week. Ok, having said that, then, a proper response to the Christmas message calls us to remember that...

1.) We are made for a mission.

As I have often said before, and as Scripture makes abundantly clear, you and I have not been saved by self or for self. Rather, it is by God’s own hand that we have been rescued, and not in any way by our own works. Moreover, we have been purchased for His great pleasure, not for puny personal glory. You see, God has made us to worship Him. He has formed us for fellowship. He has recreated us to become like Christ. He has saved us to serve Him. And this morning, we will see in our passages a fifth divine purpose for our new lives in Christ. This morning, I pray that each of us here will come to a greater understanding of the fact that we are made for a mission.

As we will unmistakably see in our passage this morning, Jesus was mission-minded. In Luke 4:42, we encounter the people of Capernaum in the throws of excitement about Jesus. As we have discussed, Jesus had, just the day before, ministered among them, performing miracles, healing the sick, and casting out demons. Our passage today begins early the next day—at daybreak, in fact. And there we see the people of Capernaum scouring the landscape in search of Jesus. And when they finally find Him, they interrupt His solitude by pleading with Him not to leave but to remain in their midst. But Jesus is resolute, and He will not be dissuaded from accomplishing the mission for which He had been sent. He says,

*“I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent”* (v. 4:43).

This mission-minded nature of Jesus is not merely seen in this text; it is a ever-present theme of His time on earth. From age twelve, when he said *“I must be about My Father's business”* until He gasped His last breath on the cross and said *“It is finished,”* Jesus never lost sight of or wavered from the purpose for which He had come. What was that mission? Well, in verse 43, Jesus declares, in no uncertain terms, that proclamation of the Good News of the kingdom of God is a crucially important aspect of the mission that motivated His ministry on earth.

And here is the main point: This mission is now our mission. You see, as believers in Jesus Christ we are meant to carry on the work that Jesus began while He walked on earth. His purpose has now become our priority because, as His followers, we are the Body of Christ. // What Jesus did in a physical body, we are meant to continue to do as His spiritual body, the church.

Having said that, however, we must recognize that our mission as the body of Christ is certainly not *identical* to Christ's mission in coming to earth. For example, even if we wanted to give our lives as an atoning sacrifice so that others could be forgiven of their sins, we could not. Among all who have ever lived on earth, only Jesus Christ has the credentials necessary to appease the wrath of God. In the same way, we should never expect to inaugurate a new covenant, culminate the great prophecies of the Old Testament, or come again as the ultimate judge of the world. These aspects of Christ's mission are obviously beyond our capacity or calling, and infinitely so. Indeed, they belong to Him alone, never to be duplicated...never to be diminished...never to be surpassed in glory, splendor, or honor.

However, as true as that is, it is equally true that, as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, we have become the continuation of the incarnation, and, as such, Christ has commanded us to assume a crucial aspect of His mission on earth. In verse 43, we see the central characteristic of that assignment: We are called to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ to those who have not heard. Whereas the crowds in Capernaum wanted Jesus to stay put, He knew that He had come so that He might go. The same is true of you and me. Coming to Christ in faith automatically includes being sent into the world as His representative. As Jesus declares in John 20:21, *“As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”*

You and I have been made for a mission and that mission is to introduce people to God. The Apostle Paul clearly understood our mission on earth this way. In 2 Corinthians 5:20, he writes, “*We are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.*” Communicating the necessity of this task to Christians was a chief priority of Paul’s, and it was a chief concern of his because it was first a chief priority of Christ. In fact, this mission of ours is so significant to Jesus that His announcement of it is recorded five different times, in five different ways, in five different books of the New Testament.

- Matthew 28:18 – *Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*
- Mark 16:15-16 – *He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”*
- Luke 24:47 (NLT) – *“With my authority, take this message of repentance to all the nations, beginning in Jerusalem: ‘There is forgiveness of sins for all who turn to me.’”*
- John 20:21 – *Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”*
- Acts 1:8 – *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

These verses define the mission we have been given by Jesus. It is the same mission to which we see Him joyfully submitting Himself in verse 43. Moreover, it is not simply our mission; it is our *commission* from God, our Commander in Chief. These directives come to us as divine marching orders, sent down from our exalted leader who has purchased our souls at history’s highest possible cost. This is our Great Commission, and it is not optional. If we have truly been enlisted as members of God’s army through faith in Christ, then it is our duty to proclaim the Gospel to a lost world in desperate need of its redemptive reality. To disregard it is to disobey God, because Christ calls us not only to come unto Him but to go out for Him. Indeed, we have been made for a marvelous mission. Let us, therefore, “go and tell it in the mountain that Jesus Christ is born!”

A second proper response to the Christmas message is to remember that...

2.) We are redeemed to reach out.

As we examine our two verses from Luke chapter four, it is clear that Jesus was not content to limit the proclamation of God's favor to the people of Capernaum who had already seen Him and heard the Good News. In verse 43, He reveals a critical aspect of His earthly agenda, which, as we just discussed, has now been left to us as our Great Commission. He says, "*I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent.*"

In essence, what Christ is telling us here is that fullness of Christian living comes not only in receiving Him through faith, but also in reaching out and sharing that faith with others. In that line of thought, listen to the urging of Paul in Philemon 1:6, where he writes, "*I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ.*" During this time of the year, we celebrate the message that Jesus Christ was born of a virgin in Bethlehem to give His life for the salvation of all who will believe, and when it comes to this life-transforming truth, let us realize that we have in no way been redeemed to recoil or retreat. No, we have been redeemed to reach out!

Therefore, if we are to be a congregation that understands our calling to reach out, then we must "look beyond" in three important ways (only the first of which we will examine today).

First, reaching out means looking beyond ourselves. As I am sure most—if not all—of us will attest, this kind of reaching out in personal evangelism involves a type of self-denial that does not come to us naturally. And unless we learn to look beyond ourselves unto the eternal needs of others, selfishness and worldly desires will all too quickly muzzle our mission. Thus, if we are going obediently and joyfully reach out as Christ did we will have to overcome a world full of temptations which insidiously entice us to do otherwise.

In our verses this morning, Jesus does just this very thing. If we look carefully, we will see Him surmounting some of the most powerful temptations that keep you and me from accomplishing God's mission in our lives. Consider the events that culminate in verse 42. As we have seen, the people in Capernaum were absolutely enamored with Jesus. They were thrilled by the truths He had been telling them. Look back at verse 32. It says, "*They were amazed at his teaching, because his message had authority.*" Not only so, but they were also dazzled by the miracles He had been performing in their midst. In verses 36 and 37, we read that "*All the people were amazed and said to each other, 'What is this teaching? With authority and power he gives orders to evil spirits and they come out!' And the news about*

*him spread throughout the surrounding area.” Even more, in verse 40 we see the people enthusiastically bringing to Jesus “all who had various kinds of sickness, and laying his hands on each one, he healed them.”*

What is the point? The point is that Jesus was a huge hero in Capernaum. The people adored Him...maybe not for all the right reasons...but they were captivated by Him nonetheless. In fact, so excited about Jesus were they that they scoured the terrain looking for Him, and they were looking for Him so that they might beg Him not to leave. I don't know if something like has ever happened to you, but it sounds terrific, doesn't it.

-- The closest thing I have experienced:

- The inner thrill of signing autographs after concerts and youth camps.
- Understanding that it was all ridiculous, but drinking it in nonetheless.

We would all like to be as popular as Jesus was in Capernaum, wouldn't we? To be the person that everyone is talking about, praising, and wanting to be around—what a dream! Remaining in that environment must have been quite tempting to Jesus. I can assure you that it would be for me. However, Jesus was unflappable in the face of duty, and He was not about to trade it in for fleeting fame. Indeed, Jesus' desire to accomplish His mission was so resolute that He persevered in it to it all the way to and through the pain and shame of the cross.

If you and I are going to remain true to our calling, we must maintain the same type of focus upon our mission as Christ maintained upon His. We must recognize that personal popularity and worldly wealth are not God's purposes for our lives. While God may ordain that we enjoy some of these privileges, they are never themselves the goal of our mission. Furthermore, if we do enjoy these gifts, we must realize that they have been given to us by God, and we have received them for His glory, not our own. God's mission for our lives brings rewards that will be redeemed chiefly in heaven, not on earth. Therefore, our mission requires us to follow the example of Jesus by setting aside worldly objectives so that we might wholeheartedly pursue heavenly ones. It means cultivating complete commitment to God's purposes in the face of competing desires. It means dying to self and reaching out in love.

-- Conclusion

Our response to Christmas ought to be like that of the shepherds on that very first Christmas night. In Luke 2:16-18, we read about the type of Christmas spirit that we are remarkably blessed to emulate: *“So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him,*

*they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.” // They saw the glory of the Son of God and they were immediately motivated by a magnificent mission. They rushed on to reach out, they reached out to speak up, and they spoke up to introduce everyone they met to the glory of the Christ child. And those who heard them were amazed. Let us like those shepherds “Go and tell it on the mountain that Jesus Christ is born.”*