

11/28/2021 - "The Longing of Our Hearts"

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Preacher: Brenton Beck

[0 : 00] Good morning, Steel Valley Church. Everyone in person or distant, we'll call it distant learning right now.

It's great to be gathered here as we enter into the Advent season of a sermon series called The Melody of the Gospel.

And we have to consider the many sounds of Christmastime, the longings of Christmas.

And I kind of feel like I'm one of those in wintertime that is longing for summer. Come on, people.

Can I get an amen? All right.

So good. I'm glad that we're divided here as a church today. That's good to know. So I will advocate for summer. I sound like Olaf from Frozen, just longing for summer.

[1 : 02] But I'm not a snowman, unknowing of his demise if summer were to come. But the Christmas season is full of longings, the longing of gathering once like we did with loved ones that have gone on to be with the Lord, maybe loved ones that have gone and moved away that are no longer as local as they used to be.

I think I could speak for all of us. I think we could unite here as a church if I speak that I think our one longing that we have in common is that Mariah Carey didn't want anything for Christmas or anyone for Christmas.

Is anybody opposed to that motion? No? Because all she wants is somebody, but all I want is maybe for her to have a sore throat on the time that she's recording that.

Because that comes on. I know, isn't that? No, we love Mariah Carey. I don't know if we do or not, but God bless her. Maybe Wham's Last Christmas, where he continues to talk about giving his heart to someone special.

The longing is that it would probably be his last Christmas of singing that song, but it never comes. But we have many, many Christmas songs.

[2 : 33] We have Christmas longings around this time period. And there exists one carol that we hear often on the radio or within churches being sung by many choirs is the ancient longing of God's people for Emmanuel.

And while carols are not something that we would consider inspired in this church gathering, there is possibly some biblical truth behind some of these carols that we sing.

And so this series is going to be honing in on that. And today's message is going to be titled, O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.

This song is unique because each stanza of the song presents a, we'll call a thematic three.

That the first line of each stanza presents an attribute or description of their longing.

[3 : 53] And the following two to four verses, two, three, and four, describe a situation or an outcome that is specifically longed for, that is attached to the attribute just previously introduced in line one, and then there's this common refrain throughout that carol, isn't there?

A refrain of hope in God's promise. Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel, right? It's interesting, though, because while its structure is unique, its tone is unique too, right?

There's certain musical aspects and arrangements that you just can't get away from the tone that it communicates.

And within this carol, there's sort of this looming dreariness within this entire carol that strings throughout.

When it was written in the 18th and 19th century, somewhere within that time frame, it was actually sung not with a bunch of different pieces. You had soprano and tenor and alto and bass, like a choir.

[5 : 09] It was sang in one common melody, everyone on the same pitch. It was known as plain chant. And I think that even adds more of the felt dreariness, the loominess, the moroseness of that carol.

And it's interesting because it's so popular. A Christmas carol that's so popular with so much dreariness, so much minor keyness into it.

It has archaic language spread throughout, and the biblically distinct words differ from the celebratory tone of many of the carols we sing.

Hark the herald, angels sing, up from your seats, church, joy to the world. And then you have, O come, O come, Emmanuel, with this minor key that communicates this morose tone.

We see within a song there is a thematic setting and a story that it communicates of the longings of Israel long ago.

[6 : 21] And the promise of a Messiah whose first advent had not yet come. And this similarly can be applied well within the church today, and not longing for the first advent of Jesus Christ, but the second, when the king will return to earth to establish a new earth.

And so let's look into the theology of Christmas through the songs that we hear and sing. And no, Mariah Carey will not be one of the songs on the charts.

Sorry, I think two people just left the church. So let's pray as we go into God's word, as we look at what this song is saying.

Let's pray. Father, thank you for this gathering. Thank you for this weather, whether it brings us joy or pain.

God, we know that each day is a gift from you. And so we pray that we use these moments of our gathering here at this time of Steel Valley Church to look upon your word, to see what you've been doing since day one of your creation.

[7 : 42] Father, we pray that we can see something communicated within the gospel that is so applicable to our lives today. And Father, help us to see that Christmas time is a time that we reflect upon you even more so.

And secularly speaking, is a time where the world is lit up. And Father, we pray that we are able to reveal the light that is Jesus Christ in this season, that it's a significantly special, designated light in this world.

And so, Father, help us to see that. Help us to study your word well today. And help us to understand your word. And we praise in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. The first section, we're going to be looking at three verses, three stanzas of the song. It was originally written with five, but to coordinate the music that we'll sing after in the sermon, we're going to be looking at three of the five.

And the first one is the longing for Emmanuel. Jesus Christ is first described as Emmanuel.

[9 : 02] And this means God with us. That God's word tells us that the word became flesh.

The word was incarnate. And the word was Jesus. He was robed with humanity, experiencing all of life's joys, all of life's necessities, all of humanity's labors, frustrations, and sorrows.

John chapter 1 verse 14 says, And the word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory. Glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

It was only through this incarnation that an all-sufficient, eternal God would be able to experience the weight of sin and the effects of sin, the weakness that comes from a broken world, a broken creation, all the temptation, all the suffering.

But why did he come? And to whom did he come to? This stanza of the song captures the exiled state of Israel throughout the Old Testament and their longing for a Messiah, their need for a Messiah.

[10 : 39] That ancient Israel would be crying out to God for him to send someone.

They needed help in ancient Israel. And some thought it might have been Abraham. Some thought it would be Moses or Saul or David and many other kings.

That's people. And the state of being exiled, specifically, refers to a state being away from your native country or your native land.

And this is against your will. To be sent into the unknown against your will is to be exiled. Men, that's us being forced to go to Macy's and sit outside of that changing room while our wives are inside trying on clothes.

This is a forced thing to be forced into a foreign country apart from our will. Exiled. This is largely captured throughout the Bible of the displacement of Israel and Judah from the promised land because they specifically broke the covenant of the Lord.

[12:08] Exile was primarily punishment for breaking the covenant. And it can be referred to as from very different themes and very different references.

Exile can be referred to as abstract exile, as Ezra often puts it. Or to a particular Babylonian exile, as you see in 2 Kings.

or to just simply the people who are exiled, as Isaiah speaks to. And this exile is sort of, if you can stand back from God's word for a moment and stand back and you'll see this musical staff kind of playing through and this common melody that continues all throughout the narrative of the lines of Scripture, it's strongly depicted.

You see exile in Leviticus 18, verse 25 through 28, where exile is depicted as the land vomiting out a sinful people because of their uncleanness.

Leviticus continues in chapter 26 of verse 33, and God says he will scatter, and then he will scatter them among the nations.

[13:28] Deuteronomy 28 says something similar in verse 36 and 37, that God promises to drive them among unknown people for their disobedience and scatter them in verse 64.

Deuteronomy 30, 1 through 3, Moses reassures Israel if they repent, God will bring them back to these places that God banished them. And through the times of the kings, through the minor prophets of Micah, Amos, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, there are warnings that if Israel would just return to God, that they would not have to go into exile.

And you see this theme of exile even continuing into the New Testament. This refers to exile generally as a dispersion, which is mainly a technical term for the Jews living outside of the promised land.

And it's interesting because the very thing that Israel longed for in their exile state is found and remedied in the person of Jesus Christ is what they're longing for.

The thematic exiling of the Old Testament is brought and remedied by the arrival of Jesus Christ. And the New Testament reverses that exiling to an actual gathering of people.

[15:08] This is what we speak about in John 10, of Jesus being the true shepherd, that he has come to gather his sheepfold, but also in John 10 to gather those outside of the sheepfold, Jews and Gentiles like us.

And every Christmas we sing, O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel, that mourns in lowly exile here until the Son of God appears.

What a great reminder within just a couple stanzas of our shared spiritual states with Israel, right? Apart from Jesus Christ, church, we are exiled in sin.

We're exiled from a holy, just God who created mankind to enjoy him and to glorify him forever.

However, unlike Israel, we have the glorious hope that we have seen according to God's word and redemptive history being unfolded, that the longing of Israel is the very person of which creation groans and waits for a dawning of the second advent of Jesus Christ.

[16:45] And the longing of our hearts is the return of Jesus Christ. The redemption found in our exiled state from sin and the return of Jesus Christ in the second advent.

And we see something similar to that. We see the longing for the rod of Jesse. Jesse. We're going to unpack that in a minute.

The second stanza of this song of the carol refers to the rod of Jesse or some versions of the carol say branch of Jesse.

And this is representative of the promise to the lineage of King David. And the prophet Isaiah had insight into a day where Israel would be devastated.

The prophet Isaiah had insight from God of a future day that they would be decimated. They would be extremely devastated.

[17:59] Isaiah 11, one through two, it should be up on the screen as a cross-reference. I have some cross-references up on the screen. Isaiah 11, one through two, it says, there shall come forth a rod from the stem of Jesse and a branch shall grow out of his roots.

Isaiah reveals that David's lineage would be decimated within the context of his writings here. And the mighty family tree would soon be devastated down to a mere stump.

And the promise out of that stump would be the savior of the world.

Now consider the imagery for a moment. For anyone who has ever chopped down their own tree, any lumberjacks in here, I'm an amateur at it.

I haven't killed myself yet. Or if you've watched anyone do any tree work on your property, you can definitely understand that the vastness of the tree that's being cut down, as mighty as how many limbs are just spread out throughout the sky, is in no comparison to the deep root system that is embedded within the ground in order to hold up such a vast picture of life.

[19 : 37] And so in the biblical expression, the promise of God is rooted and cannot be thwarted. That even though you might cut a tree down down to a stump, the root system is still intact.

And from that stump, as illogical as it may seem, will come the promised one, the rod of Jesse, the branch of Jesse.

You know, consider our natural inclination of snarkiness. Some people excel at it more than others. And if you think of how that comes natural to us to just be snarky, and you kind of look at ancient Israel to the probably perceived snarkiness that they would look around at everything that's happening to God's people and saying, what is going on?

We're being destroyed. There's no hope left for us. Is there anything outside of this rubble that can possibly continue the promised lineage of David?

Think of this. This is a time where God's people are scattered in exile due to the effects of sin, of Satan's tyranny.

[21 : 16] Though the destruction due to sin is significant, God's might is greater because he promised to them a branch from a tree long thought dead would appear a promise of new life to give them victory over the grave.

And every Christmas we sing, O come, thou rod of Jesse, free thine own from Satan's tyranny, from depths of hell thy people save, and give them victory over the grave.

What a great reminder for us to survey our lives and see complete rubble at times. Knowing that Christ is the only one who can bring resurrection life from that which is dead or perceived to be dead.

I don't know who may be here who might be struggling and looking at your situation, your circumstance, looking at perceived rubble as if the promise of God within your own life, even maybe of your own salvation, questioning, am I even saved anymore?

Does the promise of God even remain for me? Because trust me, if I survey my week and I were to go up to this stage and confess my sin before people, they'd probably exile me as rightfully I should be.

[22 : 58] How many of us may perceive that in our own lives? Or maybe you're just as if God has kind of saved you and then he's just placed you in a blender and just gave you a whole plethora of issues to deal with as he refines us into holy people through life's challenges.

Whether you lack assurance or lack confidence in the promise of God, we see something that happened within Israel's history that regardless of what perceived to be dead, God brought life through it.

And even though that life appeared to just be a mere branch, it spans out across time as a promise being fulfilled. With every experience of death in our lives, whether it's suffering from physical death or betrayal of friends or maybe close loved ones suffering, going through significant trials, all of these bring about this grieving process, doesn't it?

However, what a great reminder that the one who can free us from Satan's tyranny in this life and life to come, that strength comes from the Lord alone.

And God's promise, God promises resurrection life. And those who trust in him are promised.

Those who trust in him are promised, church, promised to be raised one day.

[24 : 35] And we hope, not in the maybes of God, but we hope in the promises of God that are sure, that are a steady anchor that's deeply rooted and a firm foundation.

Might we trust in the Lord and may the longings of our heart cry out for the resurrection among the rubble and trust in God who came into our mess and paved a way for salvation to all of us.

A carol like this should remind us of that very aspect, that the longing of our hearts is to faithfully hope in God's promise.

And we see the third stanza being the longing for the day spring. The longing for the day spring.

And now, day spring is sort of an old term. We don't necessarily say that anymore as commonly as it was referred to in the KJV.

[25 : 43] The KJV has its twice in the entire Bible the term. And this is not to be confused with the Hallmark competitor on a Rite Aid shelf near you as a day spring card.

This is day spring that's rooted in what the Bible makes day spring to mean. This means dawn or morning. And Job 38, I think it should be up on the screen.

I'm going to read the KJV and you can see how it's actually translated in our version today. Maybe I'll put it up. I got it.

It's up there. It says in the KJV, Hast thou commanded the morning since thy days and caused the day spring to know his place?

And the second reference of day spring occurs in Zachariah's prophecy at the birth of his son John in Luke 1.78. In the KJV it says the day spring from on high hath visited us.

[26 : 53] And you see how the words have been translated to communicate something to us in our changed language barriers from old English.

And today it's day spring is known as a new day. The dawning of a new day. This clues us into the dawning of a new day that rests within Jesus Christ's power alone.

John 1 verse 4 says in him was life and the life was the light of men. And verse 9 through 10 continues saying the true light which gives light to everyone was coming into the world.

The dawning of a new day. And he was in the world and the world was made through him yet the world did not know him. And this is the joy that is at a short distance away.

Just as the song says cheer us by thy drawing nigh. That give us joy that's a short distance away from us.

[28 : 11] And additionally considering the gloomy clouds, the dark shadows that this carol speaks about, the longing of this stanza is for Jesus Christ to come inaugurate a new day of light amid the darkness and to illuminate.

And every Christmas we sing, O come thou day spring from on high and cheer us by thy drawing nigh.

Disperse the gloomy clouds of night light and death's dark shadows put to flight. Light always is the victor against darkness and the same is true when Jesus Christ enters into that darkness.

Jesus has the power to disperse the gloomy clouds and even the enemy shudders at Jesus Christ's name putting the shadows to flight.

It doesn't take too long in the book of Revelation to see where the victory rests. In my opinion, the illustration of light and darkness, the power of light over darkness is one of the strongest examples of the supreme unfathomable power of Jesus Christ over darkness, over sin.

[29 : 36] And it doesn't matter how thick the darkness can be, right? The darkness can be significantly appearing as thick, that there's nothing you can see, not even ounce of light, and within the flicker of one single insignificant matchstick can illuminate an entire room, this big even.

Isn't that one of the most powerful illustrations? And not only that in the person of Jesus Christ, in the work of Jesus Christ, that power is also illuminated.

We see that in Colossians 1.13, that he has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us. Notice, he transferred us.

We didn't walk out of darkness, trust me. If we had the choice between light and darkness, we would continually choose darkness in our sin, in our exile.

but he has transferred us. He has taken us into the kingdom of his beloved son, in whom, verse 14 says, we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins, the remedy for our exile.

[30 : 56] We who were once found in darkness, Jesus Christ has ransomed us from utter rebellion from God. And upon his saving work in our lives, a flame has illuminated within us, and our darkened state and awareness has been brought upon the word of God.

And in this, we share the longing of the day spring, don't we? The dawning of a new day, a day of light. The dawning of a new day, one who would restore that which the fall has broken.

What a great image of the longing of our hearts, the dawning of a new day, a day spring when sin is no more. Church, you awake this morning?

This is good news. Now, I left out a couple other verses within this song.

It goes on to talk about the key of David, David being the lineage of David being the key to eternal life, that Jesus Christ has opened the doors for those among God's people to enter, that he's the Adonai, Lord of might.

[32 : 15] Come, Emmanuel. Come, Rod of Jesse. Come, day spring. And the haunting reality that this carol contains is that you cannot escape the longing of our souls when we are displaced from God, when we are experiencing decimated lives, when life is dark, when we are lost and when our lives seem in complete disarray, there comes one line and the refrain that I haven't included within the message yet.

This comes in like a morose refrain. In the minor key, rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel, and shall come to thee, O Israel.

right? It's almost as if in our longing of being disconnected from God, we want God to come and we're ministering to our hearts, rejoice with every fiber of our being because Jesus Christ will come through.

That in our, in the decimation in our lives, in our rubble, as we're saying, God, am I even saved? I'm going to hold on to your promise.

And this is saying, rejoice, rejoice. Jesus' promise is true. And that when we're in darkness, when we're wanting that we see the news and we look upon our falling apart world, our divided culture, and we're saying, come, Lord Jesus, come, come, day spring and bring the dawning of a new day.

[34 : 24] Rejoice, rejoice. God's promise still remains. Rejoice, the God who is with us shall come to us just as he did to them.

And just as the psalmist says, why are you cast down, oh my soul? Hope in God. Just as what Rick spoke on his pastoral prayer, we got to ask ourselves in a message titled, The Longing of Our Hearts, what is the longing of your heart today?

What is the longing of your heart? I could imagine that for someone who might not be a Christian, whether on the live stream or within our midst here, in our gathering, that if somebody is on that other side of the carol, that gloom that exists, well the Bible is a story of hope and this carol encapsulates that drama very well.

That Jesus Christ is the promised Savior of the world in a broadened sense. That was his mission. But in a narrow sense, if you don't know him personally, he knows you.

He knows the depths within your heart. He knows every longing of your heart. And he sees the depths of it all.

[36 : 09] And he is calling upon this world, not to exile you for sin, but to call you, to gather you, to forgive you of your sin.

And he is gathering his people. And is God gathering you today? Well the Bible makes it clear, if he is gathering you at this moment, the Bible says there's nothing else that you can do other than to repent of your sin, to turn from your sin and turn to the living, the true God.

To die to the longing of a sinful heart and to allow God to prioritize the longing of the heart that he will give you, a heart of flesh, and replace it with a heart of stone.

This is only a miracle of God that he can do. And additionally, for anybody who is a Christian for any stretch of time, this Carol reminds us of the longing of the church, the church being an assembly of believers that awaits, sometimes very impatiently, similar to me, awaiting summer to come again.

We await with great anticipation where we're going to see the sky open. God's will see the soft lamb of God as he appeared upon his incarnation.

[37 : 42] You will see a man whose robe is dipped in blood. There's going to be a sword in his hand, fire in his eyes.

And we will wait in anticipation of that day, the day where wrongs will be made right, where he will gather his people and bring them home.

Just as Israel was held captive in exile and longed to be ransomed back home where they belonged, this reminds us of our captivity to sin, our struggle, our constant battle with sin.

Every single day, church, can I get a witness? We struggle and toil every single day fighting sin.

And there's going to be a day where that struggle and that fight will be no more.

Judicially speaking of our forgiveness, it's been taken and it's been accomplished. It's finished upon the cross. But that ongoing battle of us repenting and repenting and repenting of sin is an ongoing life of a Christian life of dying to our sin every day.

[39 : 01] Our hearts long to be set free from that fight and return home where wrongs will be made right, brokenness mended, justice is served and all things are made new.

This is the promise that we as his church have in Jesus Christ alone who came and conquered. And not only that, he's coming again.

Let's pray. Let's pray. To be at one of the important kings of pain there Billeman Drillstine Houth
Amen I hope you said fully that was evil to take ■■■ an a everyational