



Christ's Christmas Mission
Redeem & Rebuild
Pastor Mike Fabarez

Well, when the detectives arrive on scene, when you're watching your crime shows, and they start interviewing all the people who knew the victim, they eventually get around to asking the question, "Did he have any enemies?" Did he have any enemies? I don't know if you're ever, sitting on your couch when the detectives say that, if you've ever taken time to personalize that question and say, "Do I have any enemies?" I mean, if I were the focus of the crime show, what would my neighbors say when they said, did he have any enemies? That's quite a question to think through and its one that I'm sure you don't think is appropriate for a Christmas Eve service. And I get that, but I would respond by saying I can't really think of a more appropriate question to ask you at Christmas Eve.

Because it is really what Christmas is all about. It is about solving the enemy problem. And I don't say that because that's what I think, that's clearly what God has said about this holiday himself. He has said that this is the issue of what Christmas really is. It gets lost, I know when we talk about Christmas because we use words that become so much a part of our verbiage as Christians that we really don't think through the meaning of them, words like salvation and redemption. But those words really have to do with the problem of having enemies and needing those enemies vanquished.

I just want to look at one sentence here from the Christmas story, it's in Luke Chapter 1, and it reminds us of what Christmas is, because if you miss this, it would be a tragic thing. In our culture, many people miss the whole point of Christmas. And I say even in our Christian culture, there's a lot of talk about Christ and love and coming into the world and even words like the incarnation. And they even speak of salvation and redemption, but they don't get around to the real issue, which is clearly presented to us here in this passage.

As it begins with the prolog of Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, talking about what's happening here in all the events surrounding Christmas. Here's what he says, Luke, Chapter 1 verse 68, all one sentence, it's granted a long sentence, but here's what it reads. "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel for he has visited and redeemed his people." Here, we're talking about God coming and taking on human form and coming to planet earth in space and time. He's doing something here and it's tucked under this word "redeemed his people and he's raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke by the mouth of the holy prophets from old, that we should be saved from our enemies," there it is, "saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us," that's the whole point, "to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant to us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all of our days."

I just want to note real quickly four of the words in this very long sentence that reminds us that the whole point of what Christmas is, starting with that one word that's repeated here twice,



the word "enemies." Clearly, whatever else Christmas is, its God coming to visit the earth to solve the problem of us having enemies and him saying, "I'm going to deal with those enemies," that we should, look at verse 71, "be saved from our enemies, from the hand of all who hate us." Verse 74, to grant us that we "being delivered from the hand of our enemies." I don't know if you think about Christmas that way, but you ought to. If you think about, well, what was in their mind.

Certainly, if you think back to the forefathers in the Old Testament. I mean, think clearly they had enemies. You saw Charlton Heston talking about those Egyptians that keep harassing the people of God. And, of course, those taskmasters that were oppressing the people, those were the enemies and God had to deliver the people from the enemies of the Egyptians. And later we had the Assyrians rise up and the armies of the Assyrians were a problem. Those northern tribes at Ephraim, they were always concerned about God delivering them from their enemies. That was a concern. Then the southern tribes of Judah, we had the Babylonians and Nebuchadnezzar's warriors coming and they were praying and crying out that God would save them from the hand of their enemies. And between the testaments, we had Syria and a maniacal leader come up against the people of God. And of course Greece flexed its muscle and brought some oppression and constriction to the freedoms of the people of God. And then, of course, by the time Zechariah said these words, that priest in the first century, the Romans were really fully in charge of the nation, even though they had their Senate, so to speak, in Rome and we certainly had in the Holy Land, we had the people of the Sanhedrin trying to run the place, they couldn't do it without Roman soldiers standing right outside. They were taxing them and oppressing them and giving them the rules of what they could and could not do.

You could see Zechariah probably thinking in his mind, if God is going to save us from our enemies, he's going to save us from the people of Rome. Of course, today we have a lot of talk about our enemies, the Russians infiltrating our computers this week all across the nation remains a big problem. A lot of talk of China in the last few years, of course, being our enemies. Iran, you can talk about. Depending on your political leanings, Congress being our enemies. Perhaps that's what you're thinking this week. COVID has been our sworn enemy here this last year.

All kinds of enemies and people are saying, I'd like to be saved from those enemies. Many people have been praying that we would be delivered from the hand of our enemies in our generation. But if you think about what is congruent, the things that are germane to the Assyrians and COVID, to the Babylonians and some computer hackers in Russia, the concern that we have is how they mess our lives up. I guess the ultimate concern is that they could take our lives. And that's the ultimate concern.

In the Bible, that's right out of the gate, the problem that messes up paradise, the problem of death. And God said, if you obey me, you don't have this problem. But there is a problem of people disobeying God right out of the gate in the very beginning of the Bible in Genesis Chapter 3, and that problem of sin, of course, is what you learned in Sunday school, I hope, that was the cause of the effect of the problem of death. "The wages of sin is death." And sin



really is the problem. And it's a problem that unfortunately has already seized us. We may not think about sin as an enemy or death as an enemy but both of those are ever-present enemies. As people try to mask up and social distance and keep themselves from trying to be infected by this invisible viral enemy, see we recognize that the Bible says there's an enemy that's already infected your interior. Jeremiah 17 says that your heart is desperately sick. You may not even know you have the diagnosis, but the Bible says you have it and it's already gotten into your life. And it's so bad that it's deceitful. It's already made you think that things are fine, but they're not fine, the problem of sin.

Of course, sin is simply us not being the kinds of people that we should be, not doing the things that we should do and not based on what society says or polls say, but what your creator says. And your creator has a set of rules and he says, "I manufactured all this, I'm going to tell you how it should be done." And we don't live up to what God has said. And so we don't do what we should do and the Bible describes that as sin. We fall short of that standard.

But it's not just what we should do, some of us sit back and recognize in a poignant way, it's not what we could do, the things that we could be. I could be this kind of worker, this kind of parent, this kind of spouse, this kind of citizen, but I don't live up to that. Some of us get so entwined in wanting to be that as we ought to, we have those ideals we'd like to live out, and sometimes it gets to the place of it's not what I would be, it's not even what I want. We're not what we should be. We're not what we could be. And when we reflect on the battle of sin and temptation in our life, we're not even what we would be, what we want to be. The Bible calls that all sin, and it has so desperately infected our lives. The Bible says it's sick and you have it.

And because of that problem, the Bible says it's the ultimate enemy that leads you to understand, I would hope, the kind of innate fear we all have about dying. That's why we don't want our lives to end. The Bible says we become enslaved to that fear of death, not just the pain of dying, it's what lies beyond. It's the soliloquy of Hamlet saying, "Well, what happens when I die?" There's the unknown and we are not sure how we're going to deal with it in facing our maker on the other side. So there is that sense in which the Bible says in Hebrews 2, we are all enslaved to the fear of death and there's someone behind that, a spiritual enemy, as weird as that may sound to some in our modern age that is pushing all of this. Tempting us. Getting us to get as far away from what we should be and could be and would be. And not only that, but reminding us that really, if we want any kind of satisfaction, contentment and happiness, we better have it here because who knows what lies beyond.

The problem that we have with sin is our ultimate enemy, and it leads to a really undeniable problem of death, and that clearly is a problem, an enemy that we have. The Bible says that God came to visit the planet so that he might deal with our enemies, free us from the hand of our enemies. The word that's used in our passage, look at it on the screen, it's the word in the passage that's used here, "redemption." It says, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited us and redeemed his people," redeemed his people. I don't know what your thought is when you hear the word redeemed. If you're in a church environment, you think of,



I don't know, some kind of theological concept or truth. If you're not, you may think of some kind of financial transaction.

But the word redeemed is really in Scripture, it's a word that deals with a battle, a tense conflict. It is better imaged in your own mind as thinking about someone who's taken hostage and you've got to send in the Delta Force, the Green Berets, the Navy SEALs. You got to send in the SWAT team and you've got to fight to get those people out. That's a release, a freedom, a rescue. That's the word redeemed in Scripture. And of course, it's applied to what God did when he came to take on the problem of our sin. He did it in two ways. We talk about this all the time. But this is the good news of God redeeming his people. It's first of all him saying, "You guys fell short. You're not what you should be. You're not what you could be. It's not what you would be. But I'm going to send Christ to fulfill all human righteousness and he'll live the way that you should have lived" the way that I guess if all things were right, you could have lived. And the thing that I hope all of you recognize you would have been if only you could have pulled it off to live that kind of life that fully lives up to the manufacturer's specs on what it means to live a moral, good, virtuous life. A productive life, a life without the outburst of anger, the frustration, the lust, the corruption of your own heart.

Christ did all of that. He lived that out. He did that all according to what God wanted. The Father had laid out the instructions and he himself, his Son, put on humanity so that he could live that out and fulfill it all. Then he said, I've got to deal with the problem of what they've done and I will treat Christ, my Son, as though he were the liar, the lustful one, the prideful one, the egotistical one. And so, God the Father treats his Son, the Bible says, as the sacrifice. Isaiah 53 in the Old Testament, as the Bible here says in Luke Chapter 1, was looking forward to all this redemption, saying that the Father would be pleased to crush his own Son, offering him as a guilt offering.

You take an offering, a lamb, and you slit its throat, you slaughter that animal in that ceremony. When John saw him, he knew the Old Testament, he says, "There is Jesus, the lamb of God, and he's really going to take away the sins of the world." He's going to take away the sin as people trust in that transaction and he's going to redeem them, he's going to buy them out of that problem, he's no longer going to see those people as enslaved. He's going to purchase them, rescue them, free them and move them from a place of being captive to fear of death, of even struggling and wrestling in a way that leaves them unable to please God and move them into a place where they actually can start to do more of what God says we should do and could do and would do if only we had the capacity.

And God said, "I'll give them that capacity, I'll change their hearts. I'll take that desperately sick heart of theirs and I'll rewire that. And I'll give them something that puts them in a whole another category. A relationship with me that moves them from a place of being away and alienated and no longer in relationship with me the way that Adam and Eve were. I'll bring them into a relationship with me. I'll put them in a state, in a position," that's described in our passage. Look at this next word, the third word of being saved, "salvation." "I'll take them out of that problem and I'll forever count them as part of my people." He's "raised up a horn of salvation." Horn, of course, is what these animals have if they have some kind of fighting



capacity, something strong. It's a picture of strength in the Bible of an animal being able to defend itself or to do something to save itself. Well, God knows we can't save ourselves. But the horn of salvation, the ability to fix the problem is all in God and so God comes and deals with all that and the result is that people are saved and we can go there. We can be under his jurisdiction, under his leadership. We can be in a place where our sins are no longer counted against us. The state of salvation.

And that's hard because we look around and say, "well, this is it, I realize I got a problem, I got enemies, it's the enemy of sin and death. I've got a Christ who came 2,000 years ago to live in my place, die in my place so there's redemption. I trust in that and I'm now OK? It doesn't seem OK. I don't seem impervious to the Assyrians and Babylonians or the Greeks or the Romans or COVID or China or Russia or anything else." Well, I understand that, but that's the thing about salvation. He says it's not about the "here and now," it's about the "then and there." But what I'll do is I'll make you now a citizen of what I'm going to accomplish then. In theology, we say that's "the already and not yet" reality of what it means to be a Christian. To be saved is to have the salvation granted to us but we haven't received it yet.

It's like someone bringing you a pair of 50-yard line tickets to the Super Bowl, a Super Bowl that can't be canceled, a Super Bowl where they give you tickets and say, here it is, you have it. And the reality is you can start to get excited about that, even though it hasn't happened yet. Someone gives you tickets to some expensive cruise. Or maybe some kind of vacation in a great palatial hotel on the waterfront. They say, here it is, I'm going to give it to you. You get it at Christmas like a gift card. You realize here is the promise of something I haven't realized yet, but I have it in my possession.

And those who are saved all throughout the Bible respond with the fourth word I want to point out, and it's the word that started this whole sentence, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel." People who are saved start to rejoice in something they haven't experienced fully yet. They have it already in that they possess the promise of God's oath that if you would trust in my redemption from your enemies, I will save you and right now you can start blessing the Lord. That's a word we don't use much in that context. We should. We like to use the word about stuff I get. When things go well for me I say, "I was blessed," or if we're going to do something good for someone we say, you know, "I'll be a blessing to them." We think often about blessing being something good that happens to us.

But the word blessed really is a simple compound word in the original language of the Greek New Testament that joins the word "statement" and the word "good" and puts it into a compound word. It's a good statement. That's really what the word means. It's a word that you might see as a synonym to the word "to praise" or even "to thank." It's to give a good word to someone for what they've done to me or something that realizes in my own thinking how great they are, or how kind they are, or in this case, how merciful and gracious and loving they are to save me from my enemies. Something that someone might do if the SWAT members came in and saved them from a terrible hostage situation, they would be perfuse with their thanks and praise and lauding of the people who saved them.



And here is Zechariah, without any of the experience of the freedom from the Romans or even the freedom at this point from his sin and from death, and he's saying, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel." Praise you. Thank you. It's a good thing. I hope you don't wait to enjoy the meal at the restaurant to thank the person who gave you the gift card. You thank the person who gave you the gift card before you get to experience the meal. That's really what it is for us as Christians.

By the way, that is what Christmas initially was really all about, and I mean that in terms of the practice of the Church. Christ-mas, you know that word Christ's mass, Christ mass. It was the mass that would celebrate Christ and his birth. You think, "Oh, yeah, those Roman Catholics, they have that mass. Guys are dressed funny and they raise up the wafer and all that." Don't think about the mass as the Eucharist that the Roman Catholics are engaging in at their ceremonies. Mass, let's go back even further, it's a Latin word, comes from the word "missa." It means "to dismiss." We get the word in English "dismissed" from it. And what it means is an assembly. Well, of course they do the Eucharistic ritual with a lot of different views on what that means in their case, but they have that event within the ceremony. That ceremony is a gathering, an assembly of people that has to then at the end be dismissed.

And we're the first generation really to carry around, you know, timepieces, or the second at least. So if we're calling a meeting, people get there at different times. Even now, most of you have watches on, but you all kind of sat down at different times. But at the end, you'll all stand up and be dismissed at the same time. And so the word "mass," it was the idea of coming together in an assembly to do something. What is the Church assembled to do? The Bible says very clearly that we assemble to bless God, to say good things about God, to sing songs like we've been singing about how good God is, a blessing. We bless God. Assembling.

That's why, by the way, why this is so essential. We're essential in gathering together as a church because the point is God's people must assemble. That's what the word "church" means to be called out in an assembly. We assemble together so that we might praise God. We praise God if you're a Christian because you know you've been put in this category of being saved. You've been saved because it's been purchased by salvation or I should say redemption in Christ's work. Why? Because I had a problem. That's my enemies. The enemies, the redemption, the salvation should lead to thanksgiving, which changes our perspective, I would hope, entirely.

We talked a lot about that the last ten months during the shutdown. We've talked about the reality, the fact that if I've solved this problem, it certainly changes the way I deal with all the other problems of the world and while my neighbors are freaking out about a lot of things in this life, we are concerned about them, but we're not freaked out about them because the real issues are much more transcendent than that. And if we're Christians God has solve those problems. If this virus kills us, if China's armies march in and kill us, if a meteor kills us, an earthquake kills us, a fire consumes us, what matters is have I gotten right with my creator by, first of all, admitting the problem. And that's what most people will not do. They will not think in their mind that they have an enemy that really is infecting their own heart, that leads to their



own judgment. We like to sweep that under the carpet. But if we can start with that, then we can understand Christmas. Then we can say, I get it.

Christmas is all about Christians saying good things to God about what he has accomplished in sending his Son and visiting this earth to live in our place, die in our place, so that we can be saved, we can be forgiven, we can have a future. If it's about this life only Paul said in First Corinthians 15, then you ought to pity us. That should be obvious in a day like ours where the church is increasingly ostracized and marginalized and criticized. There's a lot of reproach put on the people of God these days. Here we are, a few of us saying, yes, we're essential. And in reality, they mock us, roll their eyes, we chase our little fantasy fairy tale fable and talk about the pie in the sky. But the point is, we try to consistently reiterate time and time again when we assemble together as this is all real. The problem is real. That should be the most empirical and most provable truth of all theology. We got a sin problem. It's going to lead to a death problem which should be empirically verifiable in our mind.

But the good news is Christ came 2,000 years ago to solve the problem. It divides human history. That's why we have B.C. and A.D. That's why we sit here today on the other side of something that we look back on as the centerpiece of everything that has ever happened. The most important event of all. Christ has come to live among us. The word became flesh and dwelt among us. He gave his life for us in living and dying that we can say to God, "We think you're great. We think you've done a great thing. You are a good God, a merciful God." And we can rejoice no matter how bad things get here in this planet.

If you're a regular part of Compass Bible Church, you might have read the assigned Daily Bible Reading this morning. It's in a little tucked away passage in Zephaniah Chapter 3. Yes, that's a book of the Bible tucked away in the Old Testament, Zephaniah. A little three-chapter book, we read the last chapter. We read all three chapters, actually, but we finished with the last chapter in Chapter 3 and it ended with this paragraph. Let me read it for you and see if it doesn't tie everything together.

It says in verse 14 of Zephaniah 3, saying to the people of God, "Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion." Figure those words out now. "Sing aloud. O daughter of Zion," daughter were citizens of Zion, a place, a community, a kingdom where part of this group that Christ has redeemed. That is what was looked forward to throughout the whole Old Testament. So sing. Sing, shout for joy. "Rejoice and exult with all of your heart. O, daughter of Jerusalem!" Why? Because "the Lord has taken away the judgments that were against you; he has cleared away your enemies. The king of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst." Right? That was the whole point, Emmanuel. God with us. God was going to come and visit the planet to deal with our enemies. "You shall never again fear evil."

I hope that's where you are today. And it says, "On that day," it says when God ultimately ensconces his king on a throne on this earth, it says, "Fear not, O Zion, let your hands never grow weak. The Lord, your God is in your midst, the mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with a loud



singing." And it ends with this one verse, this one sentence, "I will gather those of you who mourn, I'll gather you for the festival so that you will no longer suffer reproach."

It's a good, good, good statement about what Christmas is all about. The vanquishing of our problem, the removal of our enemies, the ability, the enabling of us, to be able to say as we trust fully in what Christ has done, that we are right before our king, that we have a world to look forward to where our reproach is completely removed. This is not what it's about, not the "here and now." It's about the "then and there." And I hope you're ready and your heart is prepared by recognizing the problem, by trusting in the redemption, by asserting that you know you are saved and you prove that every day by rejoicing in the finished work of Christ. Make that the reality for your heart this Christmas, but it all starts with you knowing, yeah, we got enemies, but praise God, because of Christmas, they've been dealt with.

Let's pray. God, help us to tune our hearts to exult in the exalted Christ. That we can rejoice and lift our spirits because Christ has lifted us from the ash heap, literally from a place where we deserve to be punished by the wrath of your fury, but you have taken that penalty and removed our judgments from us. God, because you're a merciful and gracious God and that's why we pray. That's why we say these good things about you. That's why we sing and sing these good statements about you, because we know we had a problem we could not solve. We know we had a disease, a sickness in our heart that could not be remedied on our own, but that Christ has done it for us and that we trust fully in what he has done. We show that by our lives, by obeying you, even down to assembling together and singing together, opening the word week in and week out and learning about what you have done for us in your son Christ.

So please, God, accept our worship even now in this final song that we sing and even as we prepare to rejoice, as that great passage in Zephaniah alludes to as we rejoice together in the festival, we want to have a foretaste of that in our Christmas celebrations now with food and friends and family. And even as we set our minds to that through singing in these last few moments of our assembly here together, would you dismiss us with your grace and a renewed optimism and the good things that are in our future, but perhaps not in the next five months, five years or 50 years. But, God, we know for eternity you've settled the problem for us and we're grateful for that. Make us more grateful even now as we sing.

In Jesus name. Amen.