

## 2<sup>ND</sup> WEDNESDAY IN ADVENT

DECEMBER 11, 2013

### NO MORE DESOLATE PLACES

Pastor Jim Dunn

#### **Psalm 107:4-9**

- 4** Some wandered in desert wastes,  
finding no way to a city to dwell in;
- 5** hungry and thirsty,  
their soul fainted within them.
- 6** Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble,  
and he delivered them from their distress.
- 7** He led them by a straight way  
till they reached a city to dwell in.
- 8** Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love,  
for his wondrous works to the children of man!
- 9** For he satisfies the longing soul,  
and the hungry soul he fills with good things.

“For He satisfies the longing soul, and the hungry soul He fills with good things.”

(Psalm 107:9)

There is an old story about a good king named Rupert. He issued a decree. On Christmas Day, there should be no sorrow anywhere in his kingdom. Though he was a good king, the motivation for this decree was not purely unselfish. You see there was a generally held belief in Rupert's kingdom that the Christ Child returned every year on Christmas Day. But when the Child returned for His annual visit, He went only to those who were the most poor and in need in the kingdom.

Well, King Rupert desperately wanted to meet the Christ Child. So, he did everything in his power to make sure that no one in his kingdom was in need on Christmas Day. Still, every year the Child found someone in greater need than good King Rupert. Year after year, his hope for a visit from the Christmas Child was disappointed.

We retell this story on a day when we hear Psalm 147 saying that God provides food for man and beast. "He prepares rain for the earth; He makes grass grow on the hills. He gives to the beasts their food...He fills you with the finest wheat..." We retell the story of good King Rupert at the time of the year when charities like the Salvation Army and Harvesters are working their hardest to carry out King Rupert's vision: no one in need on Christmas Day.

So, if God is providing food and charities are providing food, are they in the same business? If so, then why are people still in need? In fact, it would seem that if only God did His job there wouldn't be any need for the Salvation Army or Harvesters. If all the earth really did get rain in just the right amount and at just the right time, there would be no more famines. If grass grew on every hill and the beasts did receive their food, then who would go hungry? If the Lord really does take pleasure in those who fear Him, then why isn't He filling all of His people with the finest wheat, every day, three times a day?

Because these questions are not merely theoretical, because these questions **do** get asked, it's important that we remember what God's Word says about these things.

In this same Psalm 147, the psalm writer says that the Lord "gathers the outcasts of Israel. He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds... The Lord lifts up the humble; He casts the wicked to the ground." (Ps. 147:2-6)

Do you hear the words of this psalm? Outcasts. Brokenhearted. Wounds. Humble. Wicked.

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This is no perfect world the psalmist is speaking of. This is no paradise in which everyone eats his fill and everyone is happy. It is a world of oppression, exile, injury, humiliation, pride, and greed. These things have filled our world, and we daily wage war against them.

**So does the Lord.** The psalm writer gives us a picture of a God who responds to the needs of the outcast, the brokenhearted, and the wounded, even though His world is rebellious and has turned away from Him.

Still, couldn't the same be said of our own charitable organizations? They continue to do their work even when their gifts are squandered or misdirected to the wrong people. Perhaps, we ourselves in our own work wonder about our efforts. You're doing your best to keep things running even though at times your efforts do not bring the results you're looking for. How long can you hold together the congregation by your efforts? When will the resources run out? When will you yourself wear out? What could possibly change so that the maintaining of things wouldn't take such a high toll? What are you hoping for? What are you waiting for?

**But the Lord is not waiting.** That's what makes Him different from us and from every charity. Again, remember what God's Word says. This time in Psalm 107: "Some wandered in desert wastes, finding no way to a city to dwell in; hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted within them. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and He delivered them from their distress. He led them by a straight way till they reached a city to dwell in. Let them thank the Lord for His steadfast love, for His wondrous works to the children of man! For He satisfies the longing soul, and the hungry He fills with good things."

Once again the psalmist pictures the world as no paradise, a place where people go hungry and lose their way, a world in which places have become desolate desert wastes. **The Lord answers, at just the right moment!!** The Lord who does not wait but He is at work. It says, "He satisfies the longing soul and fills the hungry soul with good things."

There was a moment when God did exactly that and not from behind clouds and snow and rain and sun but sitting among His people in a place that Matthew describes as a desolate place. A desert waste where 5000 longing, hungering souls were wandering in a desolate place searching for something and that day no longing soul went home unsatisfied. Every hungry soul was filled with good things.

In Jesus, God was not merely filling stomachs for the moment. He was at work, and is still at work, to bring about a world in which there are no more desolate places. Jesus went to the place of ultimate desolation, where He took our longing and hungering and broken heartedness into Himself, and He brought us out of the exile of sin and death and His resurrected body became the first fruits of a new creation.

We now look for the return of our own Good King, the day when the Lord will rid this world of all desolate places, where no person or beast will go unfed, and every outcast of God's people will be welcomed home.

Amen!