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O Come, Prince of Peace!

Series: O Come!

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The Village Church

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I. Introduction

- A. Few have gained more universal esteem as a poet
 - 1. He was a Mainiac by birth
 - a. That's not a statement about his mental condition; it simply means that he was born in Maine
 - 2. He distinguished himself early on in his college studies at Bowdoin that they sent him to Europe to study so he could return and assume the chair of Modern Languages at the school
 - 3. But before long he found himself as Professor of Modern Languages and Belles-Lettres at Harvard, a post which he continued for 20 years.
- B. But his academic career was dwarfed by his literary skill
 - 1. He was universally renowned for his poetry
 - 2. His most famous poem was *Paul Revere's Ride*, a poem so dramatic and powerful that it created the legend of Paul Revere that most of us think we know that isn't all that true!
- C. His powerful poetry extended his reputation such that, even though American, has a bust in his honor in Westminster Abbey
 - 1. His name is Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
- D. But Longfellow was a troubled soul
 - 1. I've found that to be the case with many great artists
 - 2. His experience of loss nearly derailed his poetic output
- E. He had lost his first wife following a miscarriage early in his career while he was studying in Europe
 - 1. But the Civil War years were especially troubling
 - 2. In 1861 his second wife, to whom he was devoted, died as the result of an accidental fire in which her dress caught fire
 - a. He too was severely burned in the experience
 - 3. His oldest son, without his prior knowledge or approval, enlisted to fight in the war
 - a. The outcome of which was not unexpected
 - b. He was severely wounded
 - 4. And of course – the war
 - a. The deadliest conflict in our nation's history
 - b. Tearing apart it's very fabric
 - c. Tearing apart north and south, family from family
 - d. Arguably the darkest time in our nation's history before or since

- F. It was in 1863 that his afflicted soul penned of the few hymns for which he is known
 - 1. The poem was entitled *Christmas Bells*
 - a. And it was composed on Christmas day, 1863
- G. It began amiably enough for a Christmas song
 - 1. I heard the bells on Christmas day
 - 2. Their old familiar carols play,
 - 3. And wild and sweet the words repeat
 - 4. Of peace on earth, good will to men.
- H. The second verse complementing the first:
 - 1. I thought how, as the day had come,
 - 2. The belfries of all Christendom
 - 3. Had rolled along th'unbroken song
 - 4. Of peace on earth, good will to men.
- I. But then, the darkness emerges:
 - 1. And in despair I bowed my head:
 - 2. "There is not peace on earth," I said,
 - 3. "For hate is strong, and mocks the song
 - 4. Of peace on earth, good will to men."
- J. We can identify, can we not?
 - 1. While we enjoy our Christmas bubble, with all the festive lights and concerts and parties
 - a. Our senses are bombarded with word of wars, murders and other forms of death and destruction
 - b. And while natural disasters are part of the picture, most of the devastation is done by man's inhumanity to man
 - 2. "There is not peace on earth... for hate is strong and mocks the song of peace on earth, good will to men"
- K. While most Americans find ways to use the season's festivities to escape the dismal state of the world for a time, how do sensitive Christians, who share the Man of Sorrow's cries, navigate the Christmas season?
 - 1. That's the essence of Advent, really
 - 2. The longing for the coming of Messiah
 - a. The hope for a dark world

II. **Plaintive Joy**

- A. It is an occasion of plaintive joy
- B. Piper: The Christian life oscillates between these two poles: the overflowing joy of the "already" redeemed... and the tearful yearning of the "not-yet" redeemed... Not that we ever leave the one or the other in this life. We are "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing." (**2 Corinthians 6.10**)
- C. One of the songs of the season that best captures this plaintive joy is *O Come, O Come Emmanuel*
 - 1. It is the song that we have been making our way through each week of this Advent season

- D. Piper: The common tune, linked with these lyrics in 1851 by Thomas Helmore, captures the plaintive mood of longing. It is not the same as the exuberant “Joy to the world, the Lord has come,” or the vigorous and bounding, “Hark the herald angels sing, glory to the newborn King.” It is an excellent musical match to the mood of the song. Longing. Aching. Yearning. Hoping.
- E. O come, O come, Emmanuel,
 - 1. And ransom captive Israel
 - 2. That mourns in lonely exile here
 - 3. Until the Son of God appear
 - a. [The longing, aching, yearning]
- F. Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel
 - 1. Shall come to thee, O Israel.
 - a. [Plaintive joy, indeed!]

III. The Hope of Nations

- A. Such plaintive joy continues in the final stanza of this hymn
 - 1. O come, Desire of Nations, bind
 - 2. All peoples in one heart and mind;
 - 3. Bid envy, strife and quarrels cease;
 - 4. Fill all the world with heaven’s peace.
 - 5. Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
 - 6. Shall come to thee, O Israel.
- B. You’ll recall that each stanza highlights a different title for Messiah Jesus
 - 1. The first verse was **Emmanuel**
 - a. Emmanuel, in the scriptures, means “God with us”
 - 2. We traced the significance of God with us through the scriptures, showing how crucial it is that God shows up
 - a. And how powerful it is to know that God sent His Son – the Son of God as it says in that verse – to tabernacle with us as John says in his gospel
 - 3. The emphasis in the verse was God sending His Son as our Redeemer
 - a. “And ransom captive Israel”
 - b. We, in bondage to sin, are purchased by the blood of Emmanuel
 - c. Who came to be with us – God with us – in order to save us from our sin
- C. Then the second verse was **Day-spring**
 - 1. Which speaks of the light emerging after a period of darkness
 - a. Like the dawn breaking through the blackness of night
 - 2. This was the hope we experience when we realize that Christ comes to “disperse the gloomy clouds of night, and death’s dark shadows put to flight.”
- D. The third verse, Messiah is called **Wisdom**
 - 1. We learned the difference between human wisdom and God’s wisdom
 - a. For Christ comes as “Wisdom from on high”
 - 2. We saw how Wisdom orders things

- a. And always has ordered things – from the very creation
 - b. Indeed, He orders our lives now – orders our private world as He transforms us into His image
 - 3. And we saw how Wisdom leads us through the minefields of life toward the goal of an eternity in God's presence
- E. The final verse is a rather unique title for Messiah
 - 1. He is the **Desire of Nations**
 - 2. This is perhaps the least biblical title for Messiah
 - a. Messiah is called Emmanuel in the scriptures, He is called the Day-spring, He is called Wisdom – wisdom personified as we saw last week
 - b. But the title Desire of Nations is of somewhat dubious origin
 - c. The closest reference for the title is Haggai 2.7 in AV and in the NKJV
 - 3. **Haggai 2:7 (NKJV)** —
 - a. 7 and I will shake all nations, **and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations**, and I will fill this temple with glory,' says the LORD of hosts.
 - 4. But the context doesn't really support that as a Messianic title
 - 5. **Haggai 2:6–9 (ESV)** —
 - a. 6 For thus says the LORD of hosts: Yet once more, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land.
 - b. 7 And I will shake all nations, so that **the treasures of all nations shall come in**, and I will fill this house with glory, says the LORD of hosts.
 - c. 8 The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, declares the LORD of hosts.
 - d. 9 The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, says the LORD of hosts. And in this place I will give peace, declares the LORD of hosts.' ”
 - 6. Recall that the nations have stripped the temple of its treasures
 - a. But the prophecy of Haggai is that the treasures will be eventually restored
 - b. And the former glory will be surpassed by the latter
- F. And yet, the hymn does indeed capture something else which is embedded in this text
 - 1. The hope of peace
 - a. “Fill all the world with heaven's peace”
 - 2. **Haggai 2:9 (ESV)** —
 - a. 9 “... And in this place I will give peace, declares the LORD of hosts.' ”
 - 3. So God will be the One who will bring peace
 - a. He will send the Prince of Peace
 - 4. **Isaiah 9:6 (ESV)** —
 - a. 6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given;

- b. and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
 - c. and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
- G. The idea that the nations long for a peace that seems so elusive in our world is, in fact, a biblical theme
 - 1. This peace is the desire of the nations, however disastrously the nations pursue it!
 - 2. The One who will ultimately achieve it is the Prince of Peace
 - 3. So it is appropriate to personify this longing of all nations for peace as the Messianic Desire of Nations
 - 4. O come, Desire of Nations...
 - a. Come, Prince of peace!
 - b. Do what the nations could never accomplish on their own accord!
- H. The question, then, is, when?
 - 1. The question is oft-repeated in scripture
 - a. "How long, O Lord?"
 - 2. This is where Advent takes us forward
 - a. Not only do we project ourselves back into the time when Israel longed for the coming of Messiah
 - b. And He, in fact, did come, lo, those many years ago
 - c. Our celebration of Christmas recognizes that
 - 3. But now, our Advent projects us forward
 - a. To the **Second Advent**
 - b. To the time when the tastes and glimpses of true peace become the fulness of our experience
- I. **Isaiah 25:6–8** (ESV) —
 - 1. 6 On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.
 - 2. 7 And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations.
 - 3. 8 He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken.
- J. This is eschatological language – language of the end
 - 1. **Revelation 21:3–4** (ESV) —
 - a. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.
 - b. 4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."
- K. Desire of Nations, Come!
 - 1. We don't identify with the Jews of the 1st Century in his verse

- a. We own it ourselves
- 2. For believer, this is what we long for
 - a. The coming of Prince of Peace
 - b. The Desire of Nations
- 3. For He alone can deliver on His promise of peace!

IV. The Hope of Unity

- A. And what is it that the Desire of Nations will bring?
 - 1. It is that elusive unity!
- B. O come, Desire of Nations bind
 - 1. All peoples in one heart and mind
- C. Eric Voegelin: The hymn's invocation ... echoes this eschatological vision, connecting Advent prayer with the hope of Christ's universal reign. The appeal to "bind in one the hearts of all mankind" anticipates a world united under the just and merciful rule of Christ, where divisions of race, culture, and conflict are reconciled. Through this language, the hymn not only praises Christ's first coming but also expresses the longing for the complete restoration of human society, a time when God's peace and love will extend to all peoples without exception. It reflects a vision of unity that transcends political, social, and personal boundaries, pointing toward the harmony of the millennial kingdom.
- D. Come, Lord Jesus!
 - 1. Come, Desire of Nations!
 - a. O, how we long for such a world
- E. The unity that we long for is not some kind of superficial unity, in which the differences between ideologies and cultures are simply papered over or whitewashed
 - 1. Not the kind of unity in which people simply ignore incompatible conflicts and differences
 - a. The kind of unity in our family gatherings in which we dare not talk about religion or politics
 - 2. No! The unity we long for is the unity in which the world submits to the Divine order
 - a. In fact, it is the unity which is most fully expressed in the unity of the Trinity
 - b. Father, Son and Holy Spirit – three persons, yet one God!
 - c. Where mutual love, mutual honor, are enjoyed in a society of pure goodness and holiness
 - 3. Really? Is that what this unity entails?
 - a. Well, let's let Jesus describe it for us
- F. John 17:20–23 (ESV) —
 - 1. 20 "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word,
 - 2. 21 that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

3. 22 The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one,
 4. 23 I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.
- G. Now, of course, Jesus is praying for the church here!
1. So our unity must begin with the church
 - a. And the degree to which the church is united as the One-in-Three are united, is the degree to which the world will know that Jesus came from the Father!
 2. But, dear friends, such unity is the only hope for the world in its final manifestation
 3. And we see it in the vision of heaven that Jesus was gracious enough to show John
- H. **Revelation 7:9–12** (ESV) —
1. 9 After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands,
 2. 10 and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”
 3. 11 And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God,
 4. 12 saying, “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”
- I. There will come a time when this unity, foreshadowed in the church will be manifested in the redeemed world
1. In which people from every tongue, tribe and nation will together bow the knee to the true King of kings and Lord of lords
 2. In which, in love and gratitude, men and women of every race and ethnicity will join together to adore and worship the Savior of their souls
 3. There may be debate about the precise occasion of that experience in the scriptures
 - a. Whether in a literal millennial kingdom
 - b. Or in the eternal state in the new heaven and new earth
 4. But it will happen
 - a. And we long for it, do we not!
- J. O come, Desire of Nations, bind
1. All peoples in one heart and mind
- V. **The Hope of Righteousness**
- A. But that’s not the whole story
1. In order for this genuine unity to occur, the holy character of God will transform us jars of clay into the image of our Savior
 2. True righteousness will reign and rule

- a. In our hearts
 - b. In our lives and conduct
 - c. In our communities
 - d. In the church
- B. O come, Desire of Nations bind
 - 1. All peoples in one heart and mind;
 - 2. Bid envy, strife, and quarrels cease...
- C. The hymn writer know implicitly that sin cannot continue to reign in believing hearts for this true unity to manifest
 - 1. So, in three exemplary categories, if we desire such a blessed unity, we must also desire to be rid of the manifestations of the flesh
- D. Envy
 - 1. Take envy for example
 - 2. We currently live in a culture in which envy is the paramount virtue
 - 3. We're told that we should compare ourselves with others
 - a. And when we don't have what others have, we must cry "injustice!"
 - b. Everyone must be the same!
 - c. And if you don't enjoy some creature comfort that others enjoy, you are a victim of some description
 - d. So, rise up, victim – you must want what others have!
 - 4. Our society has become so enamored with the envy ethic that we are founding a culture on one of the seven deadly sins!
 - 5. Yes, people are different
 - a. Everyone has had different experiences
 - b. Everyone has different attributes and abilities
 - c. Everyone has experienced the ups and downs of life
 - d. Some with devastating troubles; others with material blessings
 - 6. And the providence of God has orchestrated much of those differences
 - a. Yes, human injustice has contributed to some of those differences
 - b. But all have experienced injustices to one degree or another – we live in a fallen world
 - 7. But it is no accident that practically every list of sins in the NT includes envy
 - 8. Romans 1:29–31 (ESV) —
 - a. 29 ... They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, 30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31 foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.
 - 9. We're chided that we ought to love one another
 - a. And then the culture defines love in ways that emasculates it and renders it superficial and sentimental
 - b. Here's what the Bible says about love:
 - 10. 1 Corinthians 13:4–6 (ESV) —

- a. 4 Love is patient and kind; **love does not envy** or boast; it is not arrogant
 - b. 5 or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;
 - c. 6 it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.
- 11. There are lists of similar sins in Galatians, Philippians, 1 Timothy, Titus, and 1 Peter
 - a. And in every one envy shows up
- 12. So it's no wonder envy shows up in this hymn exemplifying the sins which must be put away for this true unity to exist
- E. Then, there's strife and quarrels
 - 1. All of these boil down to selfishness in one form or another
 - 2. 1 Corinthians 13: "It does insist on its own way"
 - a. The opposite of love is selfishness
- F. **James 4:1-3** (ESV) —
 - 1. 1 What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?
 - 2. 2 You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask.
 - 3. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.
- G. O, we long for the Desire of Nations
 - 1. We long for true unity among the world's peoples
 - 2. But we long in vain if we do not also long for righteousness
- H. O come, Desire of Nations, bind
 - 1. All peoples in one heart and mind;
 - 2. Bid envy, strife and quarrels cease;

VI. **The Hope of Peace**

- A. Only the coming of Messiah in the Second Advent will bring about this desired peace
- B. O come, Desire of Nations, bind
 - 1. All peoples in one heart and mind;
 - 2. Bid envy, strife and quarrels cease;
 - 3. **Fill all the world with heaven's peace.**
- C. It's heaven's peace that we desire!
 - 1. We make a big deal about peace deals in our world
 - a. Where conflicts are solved, fighting among ethnic factions is put on hold
 - 2. But those forms of peace are short lived
 - a. And conflicts erupt in other forms
 - b. Like playing geopolitical whack-a-mole
 - 3. No, the peace we truly long for is heaven's peace
 - a. Where genuine love, care, concern, affection among all peoples are experienced every moment everywhere!

4. And while that will not be experienced until the Second Advent, it is something we pray for
 - a. In fact, we pray for it with great frequency
5. I'm sure you pray this way frequently
 - a. I know this church prays exactly that way at least once each month
 - b. Why? Because we pray what we call **The Lord's Prayer**
6. **"May Your kingdom come, Your will be done...**
 - a. **... on earth as it is in heaven"**
- D. That's the kind of peace we desire – heaven's peace
 1. Where the King of peace reigns
 - a. Where the unity of the Trinity is reflected in the unity of the worshipers around the throne
 - b. Where the fidelity to the character of God is infused in every believer by the Holy Spirit
 2. O come, Lord Jesus!
 - a. O come, Desire of Nations!
- E. It is the peace in which we are no longer enemies of God
 1. That the reconciling work of the Savior
 - a. In dying in our place to pay the penalty for our sins
 - b. In which the sanctifying work of Christ by His Spirit mortifies our flesh
 - c. In which in our final transformation the very presence of sin is removed entirely
 - d. O, how we long for that day!
- F. And once no longer enemies but friends, family even, we enjoy the experience of peace
 1. No longer like Adam and Eve, hiding from God in the shadows of the garden they ruined
 2. But running to the loving embrace of the Savior
- G. Heaven's peace, to be sure
- H. O come, Desire of Nations, bind
 1. All peoples in one heart and mind;
 2. Bid envy, strife, and quarrels cease;
 3. Fill all the world with heaven's peace.

VII. **The Joy of Assurance**

- A. And then the hymn – each verse in fact – comes full circle with the joy of assurance
 1. Just as Piper said – our plaintive joy
- B. Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
 1. Shall come to thee, O Israel!
- C. That is the true mind of the Christian
 1. Longing for the “not yet” of our redemption
 2. Yet confident that that day will, in fact, come to all those who believe in Him!

- D. Such a joy of assurance was not lost on the great poet himself
1. Longfellow, distressed as he was
 - a. In despair over his own personal circumstances and over the war which tore the nation apart
 2. And in despair I bowed my head:
 - a. “There is no peace on earth,” I said,
 - b. “For hate is strong, and mocks the song
 - c. Of peace on earth, good-will to men.”
 3. Yet, the kernel of faith found its way out of the depth of his soul
 4. Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
 - a. “God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;
 - b. The wrong shall fail, the right prevail,
 - c. With peace on earth, good-will to men”
 5. Then ringing, singing on its way,
 - a. The world revolved from night to day –
 - b. A voice, a chime, a chant sublime
 - c. Of peace on earth, good-will to men!