

The Desert Shall Rejoice  
Isaiah 35:1-10  
December 5, 2021

Do you find the holiday season, the season that begins with Thanksgiving, all the way through the beginning of the New Year stressful? Maybe not so much this year and last year, but all the pre-coronavirus years we decorated our homes, bought gifts, wrote and sent cards, had to get ready for the guests, and attended all the parties you were invited to. All these extra things you had to do added lots of fun but also tremendous stress.

Did you know that “Do Not Disturb” sign is universal? A man named Jean Francois Vernetti of Switzerland made it to the Guinness Book of World Records in 2004 as the man who collected the most amounts of “Do Not Disturb” signs, the signs you find on a hotel room doorknob. Until that time, he had traveled to 131 countries and had collected 2,915 “Do Not Disturb” signs in many different languages. He hopes to collect “Do Not Disturb” signs from every country in the world.<sup>1</sup>

Evidently no one wants to be disturbed. “Don’t bother me,” “Leave me alone,” is the sentiment of many people. We live in a very individualistic society. We don’t want to bother anyone, and we don’t want to be bothered by anybody.

That is why holiday seasons can be very stressful. We may not be coerced but we feel the pressure to get together, to go to every party, to taste all the holiday food although we know some of them are not very healthy for us. We also feel that we need to get that perfect gift for every single person on our gift list. I don’t know about you but all of these are overwhelming to me.

Christmas shopping is a stressful task. A woman was out doing her annual Christmas shopping with her two children. After many hours of checking out all kinds of toys and clothes, while dragging and monitoring her children, she was totally exhausted!

When she came to the elevator after finishing her shopping for the day, she was ready to drop. Finally, the elevator doors opened and it was already packed. But she pushed herself into the car dragging her kids with all of her stuff. She was squeezed by others and they gave her an unpleasant look. She didn’t care. She was tired and frustrated with the whole Christmas tradition. When the elevator

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<sup>1</sup> Guinness World Records 2004, edited by Claire Folkard, etc. AI (Guinness World Records Limited, 2003), p. 105.

doors closed behind her, she couldn't take it anymore. She said, "Whoever started this whole Christmas thing should be found, and executed!"

From the back of the elevator someone said, "Don't worry, lady. We've already crucified him!"<sup>2</sup>

Can you imagine how frustrated she might have been? Christmas is a very stressful time for most people. It should not be; but it is. Our culture made it that way. The word Christmas means Christ's Mass. It is the time to worship Christ. Instead, we celebrate Santa-mas, Things-mas, and Gift-mas. We worship Santa; we worship gifts; we worship parties and things.

Some of us just want to have peace and quiet during this season; just want to hang the sign, "Do Not Disturb," and quietly ponder upon the implication of the birth of Christ Child, and the significance of God's presence in our lives.

Prophet Isaiah described the Messianic Kingdom, what it will be like when the Messiah finally establishes his Kingdom. This is what he said:

"The wolf shall live with the lamb,  
The leopard shall lie down with the kid,  
The calf and the lion and the fatling together,  
And a little child shall lead them."<sup>3</sup>

What a peaceful picture of the Messianic Kingdom! What is once considered as enemy is now sitting together and enjoying each other's company. That is the Messianic Kingdom.

But our world is definitely not like that. The comedian Woody Allen has a great line about this. He said, "The lion and the calf shall lie down together, but the calf won't get much sleep." That is how the world has been operating until now, and it will continue to operate that way until Christ comes again. We worry about our present and future. We worry about our own safety. We worry about our health. There are so many things that make life unpredictable, dangerous, and hard.

Bob Gilbert tells about a little girl who lived near the beach. She has a grandfather whom she loved very much. She always looked forward to visiting

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<sup>2</sup> Dynamic Preaching, December 2004, p. 77-78.

<sup>3</sup> Isaiah 11:6.

him. This grandfather had a collection of hourglasses and the little girl always had fun turning them upside down and watching the sand sifts through.

One day she asked her grandpa why he had so many hourglasses. He said, they reminded him that time was the most precious thing in the world.

It was getting very close to Christmas, and the little girl had not seen her grandpa for several weeks. Eventually her mother told her that grandpa was in the hospital because he was very sick and he might die. The little girl did not know what death was. Her mom told her that life was like one of grandpa's hourglasses and that grandpa had very little time left. Mom said they were going to visit grandpa that afternoon and asked the little girl to make a special Christmas present for him. The girl spent the rest of the morning working on the gift.

When they got to the hospital, the little girl gave her grandpa a beautifully wrapped Christmas gift. Her grandpa slowly opened the present and looked inside and smiled. The little girl had filled the box with sand.<sup>4</sup> She wished her grandfather to live long.

Life is hard, and the challenges we face in life often make it as if we live in the wilderness; the desert. We have issues of aging, sickness, personal heartaches, loneliness and others. The most painful book in the Bible is Lamentation. It is filled with judgment and desolation but even that book sings of the mercy of God. It says, "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness." Even in the most difficult time Prophet Jeremiah reminded his people that with God's presence there is great mercy to be experienced.

That is what Christmas is all about. It is Emmanuel, the reminder that God is always with us. With that understanding we can rejoice no matter what we face, even when we face the wilderness of life, the wilderness of loneliness. Not that we don't have any more challenges or difficulties, but that we will have the strength to face them with the assurance that God will take care of us.

Christmas means that God came to us to let us know that he truly understands us. There is nothing more comforting than the fact that God understands us.

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<sup>4</sup> Cited in "Christmas 2000" by Robert Kopp, December 24, 2000, p. 7.

In her book, Chocolate for a Woman's Blessings, Michele Wallace Campanelli shares about the Christmas experience she had one year. That year, she learned that a "special" Santa was going to make an appearance at a mall in Memphis, Tennessee. This Santa was special, because he knew sign language and could communicate with hearing-impaired children.

Michele's best friend's son, Kevin was six years old and deaf. He has been learning sign language. It would thrill him to have a conversation with Santa. So Michele who lived in Florida drove Kevin and his mother hundreds of miles to Memphis to meet the special Santa. Kevin's face lit up when he realized Santa understood him. At the end of their conversation, Kevin made a sign for a hug, and Santa scooped him up in a big bear hug.<sup>5</sup>

The joy that Kevin felt that day was probably similar to the joy that people who encountered Jesus felt. Someone understood them. Someone understood their deepest needs; their deepest longings. That is what Christmas is: God coming into our lives; God staying with us.

May this understanding lift you up and give you peace in this stressful time, even if you feel your life is in the wilderness!

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<sup>5</sup> Compiled by Kay Allenbaugh (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), pp. 29-32.