

Christ Has Called Us....To Be a Spiritual Oasis

Isaiah 55:1-5

January 16, 2010

I. Intro: A man had been traveling in the hot desert for some time. Finally, just as he was about to collapse from heat exhaustion, he stumbled across an oasis—a real oasis—not like the mirages he had been foolishly following the past several days.

Tired and weak, the traveler crawled over to the edge of a spring-fed pond and drank his fill. He then fell into the sleep of exhaustion.

When the traveler woke up, he saw the face of a very kind man standing over him. The kind man identified himself as a missionary who had made his home at the oasis, helping nurse those who had been lost in the desert back to health.

For several days the traveler stayed with the kind missionary until he regained his strength. But one day he knew it was time for him to continue his journey to his destination.

As the traveler prepared to leave, the missionary offered to give him one of his camels. The traveler was overwhelmed. A camel would be just the answer to get him safely to his destination.

“There is one special thing about my camel,” said the missionary. You have to say “Thank God” to make her go, and “Amen,” to make her stop.

Feeling elated and not paying much attention, the traveler said, “Sure, Okay.”

He got on the camel and said, “Thank God.” Sure enough, the camel started walking. Then he said, “Thank God, Thank God,” and the camel started trotting. Feeling secure, the traveler said, “Thank God, Thank God, Thank God, Thank God,” and the camel started to gallop.

The traveler was making great time when all of a sudden, he saw a cliff come up in the distance. The traveler did everything he could to make the camel stop, pulling on the reins and shouting, “Whoa, stop, hold on!” Finally, the traveler

remembered what the missionary told him and shouted “AMEN!” The camel stopped a mere four inches from the edge of the cliff.

The traveler leaned back in the saddle, wiped his brow, and said, “Whew. Thank God.” (A Minister, a priest and a Rabbi: over 90 joke classics of the highest [and lowest] order.) New York: MJF Books. 2000. pp. 90-91.)

Now I don’t know about you, but I sure wouldn’t have wanted to have been that traveler at the moment he realized what he said!

II. In all seriousness, I’m guessing that most of us here today have probably known someone like the traveler both Before and After his oasis visit. **The Before traveler is one who is:**

*wearied and worn down by the stress of trying to find the right direction to travel in life---

*might have wandered off the right path and got lost, stuck in ruts of bad choices and wandering aimlessly, not knowing where to turn next—

*might have been traveling alone for so long, and has just about given up on finding someone to join his or her life’s journey—

*might be desperately seeking some kind of sustenance to keep himself or herself alive—feeling bereft of financial security, friendship, and especially purpose in life.

That’s the traveler BEFORE the oasis visit, and perhaps that even describes someone who is here this morning, having wandered into this church by accident or by the leading of God’s hand, where hopefully you will receive the living waters of Christ’s life.

A. For you see, I believe that East Dallas Christian Church is called by Christ to be first and foremost a Spiritual Oasis—a place where those who are emotionally, physically and spiritually tired can come and find their rest. It is here that they can be fed the words of God that will sustain them, and drink of

the cup of salvation that guide them on the rest of their journey. It is here that we all find the tools we need to complete our life's mission, given to us from the day of our conception. It is here to which we are invited back again and again to be renewed and equipped for God's work in the world.

When people leave our Spiritual Oasis, I hope they look like the AFTER picture of our man in the story—but even wiser with the wisdom of God in their hearts and minds.

Christ has called East Dallas Christian Church to be an oasis for the Spirit. We exist for two types of people—the majority of which are life's travelers who need to the healing, strengthening power of the living waters of Christ; and those few of us who are called to be like the missionary at the oasis in the story. We are oasis tenders, keeping the life-giving sacred space ready for all who enter, creating sanctuary/safe-space for those who come seeking salvation.

All of life's travelers need oases such as this sacred place to help sustain our life's journey.

B. And it is here that we have received an engraved invitation to come time and time again by our God. Did you realize that's what you got with this morning's scripture? Let's read verses 1-3 together again:

¹ "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters;
and you who have no money, come, buy and eat!

Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.

² Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy?

Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare.

³ Give ear and come to me; listen, that you may live.

I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David.

Did you hear the invitation given to us by our God? We are offered the chance to enter into the divine presence, to drink at the waters of the Spirit's Oasis—and it doesn't cost us a thing—just the will to find such places and partake.

And then, once our strength is renewed, our thirst slaked—once we are ready to go out into the world again, we are called to be witnesses and guides to God's oasis, to help point the way to where other tired travelers may come and be renewed. Hear it again in verses 4 -5

⁴ See, I have made him a witness to the peoples,
a ruler and commander of the peoples.

⁵ Surely you will summon nations you know not,
and nations you do not know will come running to you,
because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you
with splendor.”

Christ has called East Dallas Christian Church to be a Spiritual Oasis in what could be the wasteland of our 21st century world.

III. So how is it that we are living up to our call to be a spiritual oasis? How is it that travelers who have come before—like many of you here today—have found your spirit nourished and empowered for your life's journey?

A. As one of the “missionaries” whose call it is to tend this Oasis of God at Junius and Peak, I feel called to make sure that we provide excellent worship for those who come each week. First and foremost, that seems to be the touchstone moment in our week that we need to be refreshed and renewed—by either the reverent grandeur of a prayerful worship in our chapel and sanctuary services or the celebratory elation of our Table service. Worship is the most important cup of living water that we can offer—for here we are fed on the Word of God both spoken and sung. Here we are given the morsels of life to chew on for the week ahead—like this morning's scriptural invitation.

But worship is not the only occasion that we slip of the renewing waters of life-giving sustenance.

*I believe our concert series is a sacred offering for travelers who connect to God's spirit by being lifted up through music.

*I believe that our Sunday School classes and our Wed. Bible Study and the lessons they offer feed those hungering for more of the Word of God than just a bite-sized chunk.

*I believe the opportunity to come and meet with all the ministers and/or Elders of this church and have time for one-on-one prayer and confession is incredibly holy time—and can truthfully be a saving and guiding moment for people in their lives.

*I believe that every now and then we truly get a person who is down to their last iota of hope, who comes here looking for a little kindness, and food, and financial help to get them passed this hard time, and we are able to help them—some have even said saved their lives.

We are a saving station here, and as such we all enjoy the opportunity to come and partake of the life-giving sustenance we receive here.

IV. But as the scripture from Isaiah reminds us of today—in fact, invites us to join in today—it just doesn't end with us drinking it in, then keeping the location a secret to ourselves. God's covenant with us is that if we come and partake, if we drink in deeply and received the strength for our work in the world, then part of that work is to go out there and help other find the help they need either here—or at some other oasis of the spirit that is the church of Jesus Christ.

We are all in this together—Christ has called East Dallas Christian Church to be a Spiritual Oasis for others—that's our purpose for being in the world. And though I don't think we've forgotten that's what our job is, I worry that we might become distracted by other things.

V. Closing Illustration:

Maybe you've heard of another saving station—this one far away from the dry desert landscape of our first story. This one is on a dangerous seacoast where shipwrecks often occur. At first the building was just a hut, and there was only one boat and a few devoted members who kept a constant watch over the sea,

and with no thought for themselves went out day and night tirelessly searching for the lost.

Some of those who were saved, and various others in the surrounding area, became committed to the mission of the saving station, and began to give of their time, money and effort to support its work. New boats were bought and new crews trained. The little life-saving station grew.

Some of the members of the team were unhappy that the building was so crude and poorly equipped. They felt that a more comfortable place should be provided as the first refuge of those saved from the sea. They replaced the emergency cots with beds and put better furniture in the enlarged building. Now, the life-saving station became a popular gathering place for its members, and they decorated it beautifully and furnished it exquisitely.

It became quite the hip place to hang out. Some even called it a club. Fewer members were now interested in going on lifesaving missions, so they hired a lifeboat crew to do this work. The life-saving motif still prevailed in this club's decorations and there was a symbolic life-boat in the room where the club initiations were held.

About this time a large ship was wrecked off the coast, and the hired crew brought in boat loads of cold, wet and half-drowned people. Some of the people had skin colored differently from those who had built the life-saving station—and they spoke a different language that made it difficult to communicate with them. The beautiful building was in chaos. The property committee immediately had a showerhouse built outside the building where victims of shipwrecks could clean up before coming inside.

At the next meeting of the membership, there was a split in the club. Most members wanted to stop the club's life-saving activities as being unpleasant and a hindrance to the normal social life of the club. Some members insisted upon life-saving as their primary purpose and pointed out that they were still called a life-saving station. But they were finally voted down and told if they wanted to save lives of all the various kinds of people who were shipwrecked in those waters, they could begin their own life-saving station down the coast.

They did.

As the years went by the new station experienced the same changes that had occurred in the old. It evolved into a club, and yet another life-saving station was founded. History continued to repeat itself, and if you visit that se coast today, you will find a number of exclusive clubs along that shore.

Shipwrecks are frequent in those waters, but most of the people drown. "Go Fish" sermon by Mickey Anders. Christian Globe Networks, inc. www.esermons/illustrations.com

I'm sure you've got the idea. If we are to be a Saving Station—a spiritual oasis in the desert or by the sea—we need to remember the mission for which this beautiful building was built in the first place.

Christ as Called East Dallas Christian Church to be a spiritual oasis that saves bodies and souls by giving them the Word of God to hear and guide them, and the Word of God made flesh not only in Jesus Christ, but in you and me and the way we tend to one another.

Got a cup of cool living water ready to offer, or a camel saddled and ready to bear another on his or her journey?

If not, then why not?

It is what Christ has called us to do and be.

Amen.