

The Value of Cold Weather

Baxter T. Exum (#1389)
Four Lakes Church of Christ
Madison, Wisconsin
December 18, 2016



This morning I would like for us to take a two-week break from our study of 1 John. Next week, I'd like for us to do some research together into what the four gospel accounts have in common concerning the arrival of Jesus into this world. And this morning, I'd like for us to do something rather unusual, and it ties in to what is going on outside right now.

We know that whenever Jesus spoke to people, he would often use the world around him to illustrate some very important lessons. In the Sermon on the Mount, for example, as he sat down and began to teach, he taught truth in a way that the common people understood. And in that lesson, sitting there on the side of the mountain, he said, ***"Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them."*** We can almost see Jesus sitting there pointing at some birds, and the lesson came in the form of a question, ***"Are you not worth much more than they?"*** And the idea is: Do not worry! And I would imagine that whenever those people saw birds from that point forward, they would probably remember that lesson. The Lord did the same thing with a fig tree, with flowers in a field, with a sower scattering seed on the fields, and on and on and on. He used the natural world to teach some very important lessons.

This morning, we look at the world around us, and the world we are in at this moment is extremely cold! We canceled our worship a week ago due to snow, and this morning (although the roads are fairly clear), it is cold out there! The last report I heard was that the HIGH today would be 3 degrees below zero. And that does not include the wind chill. Some of you might have noticed that today's Bears-Packers game might go down as the coldest game to be played at Soldier Field in Chicago. Right at this moment, the wind chill is something like 25 degrees below zero. We know this, but I point this out for the benefit of those who might be listening to this lesson online or to those who might be reading this from some tropical island somewhere. It is really hard to imagine 25 degrees below zero. The coldest I have actually felt was the day after Thanksgiving many years ago when we went to go see my in-laws up in Fairbanks, Alaska. The actual temperature that day was 55 degrees below zero. It's hard to even explain that to somebody! We had our beagle puppy with us on that trip, the snow was 5 or 6 feet deep, and for her to do her business outside, we literally had to shovel a hole in the snow in the backyard and put her in the hole.

Of course, here in Wisconsin, many of us have learned to adapt. We wear actual clothing! We learn, over time, what works and what doesn't. We learn the difference between a hat that looks warm and a hat that is actually warm. The same goes for gloves, and coats, and scarves, and socks, and boots. The weather is often reflected in the cars we choose to drive and perhaps the tires we put on those cars. We learn through experience. I remember driving to see family near Cleveland many years ago, and somewhere in northern Indiana our windshield wiper fluid froze completely solid. It stopped working, we couldn't see through the road salt on the windshield, so I got out and the reservoir was a solid chunk of ice. And we learned that day that the washer fluid rated at 20 below zero is not good enough up here, so from that day forward we started using the stuff that is rated to 35 degrees below zero, because never again do we want to be driving on the Interstate without the ability to see. And so there are things we do to adapt to the cold.

Some of us have learned to love it, while some of you are not quite to that point yet! And yet there are some benefits to living in a place that gets as cold as it does here. I am personally thankful that the cold seems to keep so many dangerous and poisonous creatures away. Over the past few days, some of you have posted several variations of a meme on Facebook. It might be cold, but we have not seen any mosquitoes this morning! And so there are some benefits of living in a place that gets well below zero from time to time. And I know it is easy to complain, there are some dangers to the cold, and yet as I understand it, far more people die every year because of the heat than they do because of the cold.

Yesterday I went online and started looking up information on the "value of cold weather," and I started finding some new reasons to love the cold. Based on a wide variety of scientific studies, researchers have discovered several benefits:

- Cold weather helps to contain the spread of pests and invasive species (plants like Kudzu and critters like the Emerald Ash Borer).
- The formation of ice helps prevent erosion on the Great Lakes, keeping water levels where they need to be.
- Ice creates a buffer along the shoreline, preventing waves from eroding beaches and wetlands.
- Cold weather makes us sleep better.
- Cold weather reduces inflammation.
- Cold weather helps us look younger.
- Cold weather has the ability to elevate the calorie burning process.
- Researchers have discovered that shivering for 10 minutes is enough to help us lose weight.

And I know that if you do not love the cold, I will never convince you, and that is okay. I will still love you as my Christian family. But that is not the point of our lesson this morning. Instead, what I would like to do today is to go through the Bible looking for references to "**COLD**," and I'd like to use those references (on this, the coldest day we've had here for some time), but to use those references to try to learn some very important Biblical lessons based on the world around us.

Some of you might remember we did this with SNOW a number of years ago as we looked at everything the Bible says about snow. Today, though, we look at COLD – not every reference, as there are so many, but the ones that seem to have the most significance. So again, we will not be looking at one chunk of scripture as we normally try to do, but I'd like for us to move through the bible and notice some scattered lessons that are all related to what is going on outside right now.

I. **The first reference to COLD in the Bible is found at the very end of Genesis 8 (p. 12).**

Now, to put this in context, we need to understand that this comes right after the flood. In Genesis 6, God sees that the earth is completely full of sin, but he finds Noah, a righteous man, and decides to save Noah by having Noah build a huge boat, as the Lord has decided to flood the entire earth with water. We know from Genesis 2:5-6 that it had never rained before; instead, God used to water the earth with a mist that would come up out of the ground. Starting in Genesis 6, though, God promised rain, and it did rain for 40 days and 40 nights, the floodgates were opened, so to speak, and the entire earth was covered in water, even covering the highest land, until everything that breathed air was dead, with the exception of Noah, his family, and those animals that were with them on the ark. It takes about a year for the water to subside, and at the end of that year everybody gets off the ark, and that brings us to Genesis 8:20-22. Notice, please, the first reference to **“cold”** in the Bible:

²⁰ Then Noah built an altar to the Lord, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar. ²¹ The Lord smelled the soothing aroma; and the Lord said to Himself, “I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man’s heart is evil from his youth; and I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done.

***²² “While the earth remains,
Seedtime and harvest,
And cold and heat,
And summer and winter,
And day and night
Shall not cease.”***

So, this is the first reference to **“cold”** in the Bible. There is much we do not know about the great flood, but it seems that the flood permanently changed our climate. And so instead of everything being watered by this perpetual **“mist,”** we now have rain, we now have seasons, we now have **“weather,”** we might say, we now have **“cold.”** So I guess if we want to blame somebody for the cold, we might blame those who sinned before the flood! But we do have this reassurance from God after the flood – with this newly transformed earth, Noah and his family were stepping out into something they had never seen before, so God gives them a promise: As long as the earth stands, we will always have seasons, **“Seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night,”** and these seasons will never cease, as long as the earth remains.

So, in terms of our first lesson from the cold, I would suggest that when it gets as cold as it is today, the cold we’re feeling today is a reminder – a reminder that this earth was once destroyed by water and a reminder that God has promised that we will always have seasons. I realize that there are many scientists who seem to be pretty concerned about our climate right now, but there is some comfort for us as God’s people that this world will always have seasons.

II. **The next references to COLD in the Bible are found in the book of Job, and the reference I’d like for us to consider is found in Job 37 (p. 848).**

In time sequence, the book of Job most likely fits right around the time of Abraham. If you’ve ever done your daily reading in a Bible arranged in chronological order, then you know that Job is right near the beginning. And so where we have it between Esther and Psalms is not where it belongs on any kind of timeline. Job, then,

most likely lived during the time of Abraham. And in this book, we have Satan challenging God. Job is put forward by God as an example of faithfulness, but Satan's response is that Job is only obedient to God because of God's great blessings. So, as a kind of test, Satan is allowed to take those blessings away.

In the opening chapter, Job loses pretty much everything – his livestock, his servants, even his children. He was still faithful, though, so Satan pressed it and got permission from God to remove Job's health, even to the point where he was covered with painful boils. It got so bad that Job's wife gave him some advice, **"Curse God and die!"** So his own wife turned against him. And at the end of Chapter 2, Job's friends show up. They sit there with him in silence for seven days. Keeping their mouths shut is about the best thing they could do, but then they cut loose, and these friends then go into a number of extended rants, basically blaming Job for what is happening. And their basic argument is, "Anybody who's going through this much suffering must have done something really, really bad to make God this angry!" Of course, that is the opposite of the truth – Job is actually being tested because of his faithfulness, but the friends are no help at all. Toward the end of the book, though, we do have some wise words from a man by the name of Elihu, and Elihu makes the argument that God is all powerful, and so he does seem to be onto something. And it is in this context that we come to Job 37.

Notice, please, Elihu's observations about God's power in Job 37:1-13,

- ¹ ***"At this also my heart trembles,
And leaps from its place.***
- ² ***"Listen closely to the thunder of His voice,
And the rumbling that goes out from His mouth.***
- ³ ***"Under the whole heaven He lets it loose,
And His lightning to the ends of the earth.***
- ⁴ ***"After it, a voice roars;
He thunders with His majestic voice,
And He does not restrain the lightnings when His voice is heard.***
- ⁵ ***"God thunders with His voice wondrously,
Doing great things which we cannot comprehend.***
- ⁶ ***"For to the snow He says, 'Fall on the earth,'
And to the downpour and the rain, 'Be strong.'***
- ⁷ ***"He seals the hand of every man,
That all men may know His work.***
- ⁸ ***"Then the beast goes into its lair
And remains in its den.***
- ⁹ ***"Out of the south comes the storm,
And out of the north the cold.***
- ¹⁰ ***"From the breath of God ice is made,
And the expanse of the waters is frozen.***
- ¹¹ ***"Also with moisture He loads the thick cloud;
He disperses the cloud of His lightning.***
- ¹² ***"It changes direction, turning around by His guidance,
That it may do whatever He commands it
On the face of the inhabited earth.***
- ¹³ ***"Whether for correction, or for His world,
Or for lovingkindness, He causes it to happen.***

Verse 6, of course, is one of my favorite verses anywhere in the Bible, ***“For to the snow [God] says, ‘Fall on the earth.’”*** But our attention this morning is on verse 9, where we find that God causes ***“COLD”*** to come out of the north. And that, of course, is not the main feature of this passage, but the big picture here is that God does some amazing things in this world – thunder, lighting, wind, and all of these things, even including snow and cold. And to me, it seems the main point of Elihu’s words here is that he is encouraging Job to remember that it is impossible for him to fully understand God’s power. In other words, there is something going on behind the scenes in this world that we may never be able to fully see. And that right there is very close to the whole point of the book of Job! So I believe the lesson from this reference to COLD in the Bible is that God is amazingly powerful! Not that God intentionally causes every weather-related event for some reason – that is not the point here (that is the same mistake Job’s other friends were making, arguing that Job must have done something to deserve this treatment), but the point is: God is all-powerful in ways that we will never understand.

So, when we go outside and inhale and our nostrils freeze shut, that right there needs to be a reminder to us – we might not enjoy every minute of it, we might not enjoy any of it, but the cold is a reminder that God is all-powerful!

III. There is another very closely related reference to the cold, this time in Psalm 147 (p. 1000).

And this time, the main idea is PRAISE. And we’re praising God for his power, and that’s why it’s so closely related to that passage in Job. Only this time the main point is PRAISE. We don’t have time to read the whole chapter, so let’s start with verse 1. This is a Psalm of David, and David says in verse 1, ***“Praise the Lord! For it is good to sing praises to our God; for it is pleasant and praise is becoming.”*** He then goes on to list some of the reasons for praising God, and we pick up with verse 16 – among the many reasons to praise God, according to David,

- ¹⁶ ***He gives snow like wool;
He scatters the frost like ashes.***
- ¹⁷ ***He casts forth His ice as fragments;
Who can stand before His cold?***
- ¹⁸ ***He sends forth His word and melts them;
He causes His wind to blow and the waters to flow.***
- ¹⁹ ***He declares His words to Jacob,
His statutes and His ordinances to Israel.***
- ²⁰ ***He has not dealt thus with any nation;
And as for His ordinances, they have not known them.
Praise the Lord!***

So, very similar to that passage in Job, King David also attributes the power to control snow and frost and ice and cold to God and gives these among many reasons for praising God.

Conclusion:

We could go on this morning if we had the time: There are references to cold in Proverbs, in the prophets, in the gospel accounts, in Acts, in Paul’s letters, and also in Revelation. We don’t have time to look at all of these, but we have looked at three of the major references to COLD in the Bible. We do not need to love the cold,

but we do realize that the cold serves as a reminder of God's promise that we will always have seasons, it gives us a reminder of God's amazing power, and it also gives us one more reason to praise God.

Before we head back into the cold this morning, we'd like to give everybody at least one more invitation to make things right with God. He is all-powerful, and he does deserve our praise, but he has also reached out to us, looking to establish a relationship, even going so far as to offer his only Son as a sacrifice for our sins. We respond in faith through our obedience to this good news – we are commanded to repent and be baptized. So we make this offer to everyone here: If we can help in any way with your obedience to the good news, we hope you will let us know. Talk to one of the shepherds of this congregation after the closing prayer this morning, or you can talk to one of us right now as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com