

Fil-Am Community Church

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“The Christmas Candy Cane”

Good morning! This morning I'll give a short message and a sweet one at that. It's a message on one of the most often seen symbols of Christmas, the candy cane. You can see them as decorations inside the house and outside the house, you can see them hanging on Christmas trees, or on windows, and you can see them being given out to children. So, they're almost everywhere. They come in different sizes and colors and even in flavor but only in one shape.

Now, what has the candy cane have to do with Christmas? Isn't it just one of those things cooked up or invented by some enterprising individual because of its business potential? After all, as the world says, Christmas is for children. They sure would love that sugary taste. So, how did the candy cane came to be?

No one really knows for sure the origins of the candy cane. If you research it you will find different versions of the story regarding how it came to be. One story says that it was a secret means of identification by persecuted Christians. This is contradicted by history because candy canes did not appear until at least the latter part of the 17th century, when Europe was almost entirely Christian. Another story says that it was created by a choirmaster in a church in Cologne, Germany in 1670 who handed out the candies to some restless children to keep them quiet during a Christmas

service and has since become a tradition. Still another story says that an Indiana candymaker intentionally created those candies to represent the birth, ministry, and death of Jesus.

As I said these are all unverified stories and that's why overall it is called "The Legend of the Candy Cane". Now, all these stories may not be gospel truth. But, when used as a witnessing tool, the candy cane can represent the truths of the gospel. And we'll see that the candy cane can represent hope in a cruel and depraved world.

So what we're going to do over the next several minutes is talk about some of the features of the Candy Cane that communicate a message. And to help you follow along, here's a Candy Cane...

(HAND OUT CANDY CANES)

First let's look at the

A. THE SHAPE:

If you hold the candy cane like this, what image comes to mind? What does this remind you?

A Shepherd's Staff. So this staff represents the very first group of people who received the good news about the birth of Jesus. This is what the Bible tells us in Luke 2:8-12, *"And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."*

Why were the shepherds the first to hear? The fact that the shepherds were the first to hear is a message to us that Jesus didn't come only for the rich and famous. He didn't just come for kings and politicians. He came for everyone.

The shepherds were essential to the Middle-eastern economy, but they certainly weren't held in high esteem. They were just ordinary people, belonging to the lower strata of society, who received the tremendous announcement of the birth of Jesus.

Folks, this tells us that God is interested in you whatever your station in life is. You see, God doesn't discriminate. He cares about you even if you're uneducated, poor, sick, weak, or don't have anything to speak of.

Maybe you came this morning wondering whether there's hope for you. You're being criticized or insulted by others, you lost your job or are in danger of losing it, you feel stressed out during this Christmas season, you're losing your self-confidence because of challenges you're facing. Let me tell you, God knows what you're going through, what's going on in your life. And he wants to say to you, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news. There is hope for you. Everything's under control."

Now, turn your candy cane upside down and what do you see? That's the letter "J" which stands for "Jesus." Jesus is your hope in this world of pain and suffering. Jesus is the Great Shepherd who gathers us, His sheep, into the fold of God. Jesus himself declares in John 10:14-15 (NLT), "*I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me, just as my Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep.*"

The shape in the form of a “J” serves to remind us that the whole Christmas season is meant to celebrate Jesus. It’s become a cliché, but Jesus really is the reason for the season.

You see, the name Jesus literally means, “God saves” or “God helps”. How does God help us through the person of Jesus? When God came to earth in the person of Jesus, he literally lived as a human being, with flesh and blood, and came to be one of us in order to be with us. In fact, that’s another name of Jesus as Matthew 1:23 says, *“All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”—which means, “God with us.”* Matthew is quoting from Isaiah 7:14 in which Isaiah prophesied the coming hope of the world.

Now, inherent in the person of Jesus is his being chosen by God to save or to deliver. In Luke 2:11, the angel says, *“Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.”*

Christ is another name which we call Jesus. When I was young, I thought it was the last name of Jesus. But “Christ” is a title of Jesus. It is the Greek word for “Anointed One”. The Hebrew equivalent is Messiah. It tells us that Jesus is the one chosen by God to save and deliver us. From what? From destruction. Destruction brought on by sin and death. And we’re talking here about eternal destruction. Being separated from God for all eternity. Being doomed to hell and missing out on all the blessings of heaven.

I like the illustration of Billy Graham regarding why God has to become one of us and be with us. He says imagine yourself seeing a line of

ants that are going toward water that is poisoned. They're marching toward their death but are not aware of it. What can you do? How would you tell them that they were going to die?

The problems are overwhelming. One, ants don't think as you think. Two, they can't hear you. No matter how much you shout, they won't pay attention to you. Three, they can't see you. Waving your hands, directing them to go back will be useless. Four, they can't understand you. If you tried to touch them, you may kill them. If you put your hand in front of them, they will climb over your hand and keep going. What are you to do?

The only thing to do is become an ant and speak to them in a language they can understand, 'Don't go that way; you are going to die. Follow me.'

That is what God did for us. He came in the form of a human being to deliver us from sure death.

The problem is, in our society today, God is not recognized anymore. God has been speaking to us through Jesus, "don't go that way" and yet people follow their own ways and end up destroying others and themselves. They don't want God interfering in their lives. Folks, that's the reason for the tragedy in Newtown, Connecticut. In Aurora, Colorado. In Virginia Tech. In Columbine, Ohio.

I saw this posted on facebook:

Dear God, why do you allow so much violence in schools? Signed, a Concerned Student

Dear Concerned Student, I'm not allowed in schools. God Folks, only Jesus can give us hope. Only he can lead us out of the tragedy in our personal lives and in the life of this nation. If we want to save

our children, we must let God back into our schools, into society, into this country, and into our lives.

Now, let's look at

B. THE COLORS:

First, notice the red stripe around the candy – this red stripe reminds us of the suffering of Jesus. Specifically, the red reminds us of the blood of Jesus which he shed on the cross to save us from our sins.

Why did Jesus have to die? This is a very important question because this is central to Christianity and makes Christianity a unique religion. But before we answer this question, let us look first at the character of God.

The Bible says that **GOD IS HOLY**. Isaiah 6:2 says, “*And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."*” Because he is holy, he is divine perfection, he is perfect love, perfect truth, perfect everything. There is no evil in God. He cannot do wrong. That is his nature.

Contrast that to man’s nature. **MAN IS SINFUL**. Sin entered the world through one man's disobedience - Adam, and now all of us are born into this "sin nature." Romans 5:12 says, “*When Adam sinned, sin entered the entire human race. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned.*” (NLT) And in Romans 3:23, we read “*For all have sinned; all fall short of God's glorious standard.*” (NLT)

Holiness and Sin are incompatible. Therefore, **SIN SEPARATES US FROM GOD**. As the Bible says in Isaiah 59:2, “*But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.*” (NIV)

Now, there is consequence for sin. **SIN'S PUNISHMENT IS ETERNAL DEATH.**

You see, God's holiness and justice demand that sin and rebellion be punished. The only penalty or payment for sin is eternal death. Romans 6:23a says,

"For the wages of sin is death." (NASB) This is not just physical death. This is spiritual death. Going to hell and being separated from God for all eternity.

All of us are guilty of sin. We need to be saved. **WE NEED AN ATONING SACRIFICE.**

Unfortunately, our death is not sufficient to atone for sin because atonement requires a perfect, spotless sacrifice, offered in just the right way. Jesus, the one perfect God-man, came to offer the pure, complete and everlasting sacrifice to remove, atone, and make eternal payment for our sin.

1 Peter 1:18-19, "For you know that God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors. And the ransom he paid was not mere gold or silver. He paid for you with the precious lifeblood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God." (NLT)

Also, in Hebrews 2:14-17, it tells us, *"Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people."* (NIV)

Folks, that is what the White Stripe on the candy cane represents. The purity and sinlessness of Christ. You see, when he was born, he was born of a virgin. God just used the womb of Mary to carry his Son. Jesus was not conceived by any sinful human being. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit. When Mary asked the angel how could she be with child when she was a virgin, the angel answered, *"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God."* (Luke 1:35 NIV)

Friend, **ONLY THROUGH JESUS CHRIST CAN OUR SINS BE FORGIVEN**, thus restoring our relationship with God and removing the separation caused by sin. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, *"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."* (NIV)

Jesus is the promised Messiah who delivers us from our sins. The Old Testament contains numerous prophecies about the coming of the Messiah. In Isaiah 9:6, for example, it says, *"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."* And in Micah 5:2 it says, *"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."*

When we are "in Christ Jesus" we are covered by his blood through his sacrificial death, our sins are paid for, and we no longer have to die an eternal death. **WE RECEIVE ETERNAL LIFE THOUGH JESUS CHRIST.**

As Romans 6:23b says, “*The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*”

Sometimes, a candy cane can have a green stripe which what you are holding has. That green stripe represents eternal life. And a new life that is lived when someone surrenders his life to Christ.

So, we talked about the Shape, the Colors, and finally,

C. The Flavor of the Candy Cane.

Now, that candy you’re holding has a peppermint taste. You can taste it if you want. Peppermint is similar to hyssop which is of the mint family. It was used in Old Testament times for purification and sacrifice just as Jesus sacrificed His life for ours.

Another thing we can say too is that peppermint has a sweet taste which represents the sweet love of God, the sweet peace we have in Jesus, and the sweet life we can live because of Jesus. Life is sweet if you’re a Christian, Amen?

The candy cane is a great symbol of God’s sweet love for us. Unfortunately, it has become a meaningless decoration seen only at Christmas time. But the true meaning is still there for those who have eyes to see and ears to hear! In fact, you can take it a step further, and begin to witness to your neighbors by taking a candy cane and post it on your door in its proper position of "J" and when someone asks your reason, simply and confidently say to them:

Look at the Candy Cane- what do you see?

Stripes that are red- like the blood shed for you & me.

White is for my Savior- who is sinless and pure!

"J" is for Jesus, my Lord, that's for sure!!!

Turn it around- and a shepherd's staff you will see-

Jesus, Sweet Jesus- was born for you and for me!!

I encourage you to never look at a candy cane the same again. And remember these words from Ephesians 5:2, 19-20:

"Live a life of love just as christ loved us and gave himself for us as a sweet-smelling offering and sacrifice to God. Speak to each other with psalms and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making music in your hearts to the Lord. Always give thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Let us pray...

If you're here this morning and you've never received the forgiveness of God and you've never begun a relationship with the risen Christ, then you can do that this morning right where you are. All you have to do is pray silently from your heart and invite Him into your life. And you can be sure that He will wash you as white as snow.

With all the gifts being handed out this week and all the gifts you hope to receive, I'm here to tell you that the very greatest gift you could ever receive is this gift of eternal life that is being offered to you.

So where are you at this morning? Do you know this Jesus? Do you understand what Christmas is all about? Have you experienced the hope, love, peace and joy you can have because of Jesus coming to earth as a baby? If not, then you can realize this morning that this Legend of the Candy Cane is much more than a legend... it's a reality. And it can be a reality for you today.

Here's what I want you to do this morning. If you're here and you don't know Jesus and you've never experienced His love and forgiveness in your life but you'd like to, I want you to just raise your hand. Please don't be embarrassed. This is just between you and God. I want to be able to pray for you.

