



This writer has a well-earned reputation for preferring things on the chilly side. When everyone else is sitting around in sweatshirts and sweaters, I'm in shirtsleeves. When long pants are being worn by the rest, I am in shorts. When my good wife is huddled under two or three blankets, I'm stretched out atop the covers, gasping for a breeze from the open window.

Lately, however, it's been cold.

I mean *really* cold.

Winter is typically one of my favorite seasons, and I—honest, hand-on-the-Bible truth—don't mind rising before dawn to bundle up and plow the drive of the previous night's snow. I love watching the beauty of fresh snowflakes falling from the sky and draping everything in their clean blanket of white—despite knowing that it means more work shoveling and plowing.

The Beast

Chilly is one thing, but bone-chilling, back-snapping cold is quite another. After an extraordinarily mild December, our January finally got it through its thick skull that this was, indeed, winter. Over the last few weeks, while reading alarmist news reports about the dire threat of “global warming,” we've had days when the high was lower than the typical low. We've had

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nights in double digits below zero, with wind chills hovering around 20-30 below.

That's not cold. That's *arctic*.

In such temperatures fingers and toes ache and stiffen; the wind slaps hard against the forehead, and sings like a hot iron; breathing is difficult, and the frigid air burns when gulped into the lungs. Temperatures this cold do something to the mind. Breath-sucking air that is that frigid brings on a paranoia, a singular desperation not experienced at other times. It's as if the cold becomes a beast, a palpable presence sucking away all comfort, all hope. And one is consumed by a desperate need to regain shelter, and warmth.

Nestled in the Shadows

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I fear no evil, for You are with me;
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

Psalm 23:4

My first job as a young lad was subbing for my older brother on his paper route. Late afternoon, after school, I would retrieve the bundle of newspapers left at the drop point, fold each paper into a throwable shape, then stuff them into my canvas shoulder bag. In the winter the route—perhaps a mile or so—was walked, and, since the sun set so early during that season, it was often trudged in the dark.

Time and distance and temperatures—all are magnified when one is young. With the sun down, six o'clock seemed like midnight. With the weight of the canvas bag bearing down, with my feet aching, with warm light spilling from passed living room windows so near yet out of reach, the few blocks separating me from home seemed like miles. And in the darkness, with the rising moon casting a silver glow across the snow and ice, with my toes and fingers and face numb with the cold, I may as well have been tramping across the ice sheets of Antarctica.

Only a few times since have I felt so utterly alone and forlorn. Trudging those frozen sidewalks in the dark, I could think of little else but how miserable I was. The unbearable cold seemed to isolate me further, making me feel like a strange alien

peering into the beckoning yet unreachable warmth of each house I passed. In that moment the cold became something more tangible; looming out of the frigid darkness was a beast set on freezing me solid. There was something of anger, of hate, nestled in the shadows.

And beyond even the cold, I was afraid.

A Tender End

Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble;

He saved them out of their distresses.

He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death

And broke their bands apart.

Psalm 107:13-14

There is no place more desolate and cold than outside the arms of Jesus. There is no place filled more with dangerous, lurking beasts than any place without Him.

Thrown out into the perils of this world, tossed about by people and situations beyond his control, the Christian surely experiences trials and discomfort, but he need never despair. There is no ravenous beast skulking after the believer, expecting to consume him whole—only the bothersome sting of an impotent nuisance. Oh, Satan tries, and he can inflict damage, but the believer knows he will never win. Stay too long in such bitter cold, and you will die, but the one who has Christ need never entertain such fears.

But pity the one who hasn't Christ.

The sense of desperation experienced while

battling cold temperatures must seem inconsequential next to the prospect of facing all of life alone, without a Savior, without a foundation. The pounding hoof beats of the true beast are suddenly something with which to reckon, something to fear. There is no shelter, no haven of warmth for the one without Jesus. He stands alone against the elements.

Trudging those cold streets as a boy, I wanted only to warm myself in the light and comfort of my own home. And the realization that eventually I would get there, kept me going, kept me pushing on with fingers and toes aching from the cold. I knew that something better awaited me at the end of the line.

Those without Christ have no safe harbor. They must pass through the cold, the loneliness, the despair, without hope for a tender end.



"Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall."

Matthew 7:24-27

*In heav'nly love abiding, no change my heart shall fear;
And safe is such confiding, for nothing changes here.
The storm may roar without me, my heart may low be laid,
But God is round about me, and can I be dismayed?*

*Wherever He may guide me, no want shall turn me back;
My shepherd is beside me, and nothing can I lack.
His wisdom ever waketh; His sight is never dim.
He knows the way He taketh, and I will walk with Him.*

*Green pastures are before me, which yet I have not seen;
Bright skies will soon be o'er me, where darkest clouds have been.
My hope I cannot measure; my path to life is free;
My Savior has my treasure, and He will walk with me.*

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