

# Carols 2011

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[ 0 : 00 ] I wonder if you've heard the story of the English lady who wanted to buy a house in a remote village in Switzerland. So she went to see one particular Swiss house, but on returning home she realised that she'd not seen a toilet in the new house.

So she wrote to the estate agent and she asked about the location of the WC. The estate agent didn't know much English and the only thing that they could think of was that WC was a wayside chapel.

So this was the reply that they said to the English lady. My dear madam, I take great pleasure in informing you that the WC is situated 9 miles from the house, in the centre of a beautiful grove of pine trees, surrounded by lovely grounds.

It is capable of holding 229 people and is open on Sundays and Thursdays only. As there are a great number of people expected during the summer months, it is an unfortunate situation, especially if you are in the habit of going regularly.

It may interest you to know that my daughter was married at the WC last summer, and it was there that she met her husband. I can still remember the rush that there was for seats.

[ 1 : 11 ] There were three people to every seat usually occupied by one. You will be glad to hear that a good number of people bring their lunch and make a day of it. I would especially recommend your leadership to go on Thursdays when there is an organ accompaniment.

The acoustics are excellent, even the most delicate sounds can be heard everywhere. Sadly, my wife is rather fragile and cannot attend regularly. It is almost the year since she last went.

And naturally it pains her very much that she is unable to go more often. I look forward to seeing them myself in the future, your subsidiary Jay Klinsman and Parkes. I don't know when that is real. I very much doubt it. But confusions and misunderstandings are common, aren't they?

And perhaps the biggest time for confusion and misunderstanding is Christmas. Because what is Christmas all about?

If you were to take a poll in England about what is Christmas all about, there would be all sorts of answers, wouldn't there? They'd say it's all about the children. Or they'd say it's all about the presents. Or family time, eating lots.

[ 2 : 15 ] Or suspending that diet. It's all about the family. It's all about Father Christmas and reindeers. It's all about James Bond repeats and the Queen's speech. And we need clarity, don't we?

And there is no better time to think about the meaning of Christmas than at a carol service. And there's no better place for them to turn to than the Bible. Because it's there that God tells you and I what Christmas is all about.

We're going to look at a verse from a letter of the Apostle Paul. Paul was one of the earliest followers of Jesus. And he's writing to a friend, Timothy. And he's saying, really, this is how I became a Christian.

I wasn't bored of that. This is how I became a Christian. And in the middle of the letter, he writes this verse. You'll find it on your sheets under the sermon. Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance.

That Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Now it doesn't sound like Christmas-y, does it? It doesn't sound very Christmas-y at all. I mean, there's no radio.

[ 3 : 18 ] There's no mention of the DFS sale. There's no mention of all sorts of things. But actually, Paul's words capture the heart of Christmas.

About what it's about according to God. Because it is actually about a rescue mission. It's a rescuer that has come into the world to rescue people in terrible danger.

So we're going to ask Paul the Apostle three questions as we go through this little verse. And we'll just discover, I hope, how amazing and extraordinary the rescuer is.

And how brilliant the rescue he has achieved. In fact, we'll see, I hope, that it's the best gift of all. So let's ask Paul our first question. First of all, who has come? Do you see it in the verse?

The answer he gives is Christ Jesus came into the world's save sinners. Christ Jesus came into the world. We live in a society in which names don't mean very much today.

[ 4 : 14 ] But behind every name, there's a meaning. So you might not know, for instance, that Claire means bright. Or that Helen means pleasant. Or Nigel means champion.

Nathan means gift. And some obviously don't they fit better than others when you think of what names mean. I read recently of a tribe in New Guinea, north of Australia, that called their children the most ridiculous things without knowing it.

They thought it was cool. So for example, one man was called Tin Fish. Another was called Second Gear. And they've got no idea what those names mean. But in Jesus' day, names mean a lot more. And Jesus Christ's name is loaded with significance. In fact, Christ is not so much a name as really it's a job description. It's his title, not his surname.

That's why Paul puts Christ before Jesus. He is Jesus the Christ. So we might have, won't we, Bill the plumber, or Elizabeth the Queen. Jesus is the Christ.

[ 5 : 19 ] Now what does that mean? Christ actually means anointed one. And the only people anointed are kings or priests. Now for centuries the Jewish prophets had said there's going to be one day somebody who will come who will right all the wrongs.

Who will be the king of kings. And he will be the one who will bring peace on earth. And he will be the one who will rule over the whole world. And he will be the anointed one par excellence.

And even more amazing. Is that God has said through the prophets that he would come. He would come himself. The anointed one would be God himself.

So this Christ, this anointed promised king would be God in skin and bones. And the brilliant news of Christmas is that Jesus is that person.

He is the Christ. He is the anointed one. The anointed king that everyone has been hoping for. He is God in flesh. When I was a teenager there was a song that was written by Joan Osborne which said.

[ 6 : 31 ] What if God was one of us? You might remember it. Just a stranger on a bus. Trying to make his way home. Well the brilliant news is that God did become that. But he is far more than just a stranger on a bus trying to make his way home.

The king of the universe has become a man. And spent 30 or so years amongst us. This king is Jesus Christ. So sometimes people say to me when I get into conversation.

Well I'd believe in God if I could see him. And to that you've got to reply. Well you would have seen him. If he had been around 2000 years ago. Yes Jesus Christ is the king of kings.

And he's coming to this world of ours. In other words. John's Gospel. One of Jesus' friends wrote a Gospel telling us of the life and the ministry of Jesus. And it says this. In the beginning was the Word.

And the Word was God. And the Word was with God. The Word was with God. And the Word was God. That Word is Jesus Christ. He is God in flesh.

[ 7 : 35 ] So Paul who has come? Jesus Christ has come into the world. And who is he? He is the king of kings. He is God in the flesh. So let me ask you. What do you make of Jesus of Nazareth?

Do you think of Jesus maybe just at Christmas as a little baby in a manger? Harmless. And cute.

That's only half the story. Because that baby in the manger is the king of kings.

And not only does he have a claim on the whole world. But he has a claim on your life. And on my life. You might think of Jesus as a nice teacher. Or a moral man.

But Jesus' claims and his actions, they just do not fit any of those usual profiles. No, Jesus claims to be God in the flesh.

And he backed up those claims with extraordinary miracles. With extraordinary credentials. He showed his power to the young and nature. By calming storms with a word.

[ 8 : 38 ] He raised the dead in full view of sceptical witnesses. He fed thousands with a boy's pack lunch. And if you think of Jesus as some kind of guy with a Kevin Keegan perm and a cute smile and Clark sandals.

You've got the wrong man. He claims far more than that. And if that's your view then can I suggest to you actually you've not examined the evidence of you. You've not looked into it.

Because the driving force of the Gospel writers is that Jesus was God in the flesh. King of kings. So what do you make of Jesus? Have you checked him out?

Please don't patronise him with a kind of moral teacher rubbish. It just doesn't wash. He's the Christ. The king. Come to earth.

Now if that's the king. If Jesus is the king why did he come to earth? I mean the queen. She doesn't just pop into Ely. Does she? To go to the pundle store.

[ 9 : 42 ] To just do a shopping. She doesn't do that. I can't even remember if she's come to Ely in my eight years here. But when she comes to Ely she comes for a reason. And so does the king of kings. Jesus comes for a reason. So let's ask the second question.

Why does he come? Why does he come? Paul tells us. Just look at the verse again. It says at the end of the sentence. It says he came into the world to save sinners.

Now again there's much confusion about saving. And sinning. As there is about Christmas really. Sin is seen as either. As he kind of eating a cream donut.

Or something that a dodgy politician does behind closed doors. That's revealed in tabloid newspaper. But when the bible tells you and I that we're sinners. And it does say that.

It is saying something profoundly alarming. About our status. About our status. About our status before God. Sin is really a rejection of God.

[ 10 : 38 ] It is our turning of our back on him. And saying. I'm happy to run my life. My way. And you may never ever have said that outright.

I don't know whether you've ever said that outright. But the way that we live our lives shows that.

We may even believe in God. But our lives actually bear no relation to him.

He is no part with us at all. We keep him at an arm's length. Christmas and Easter might be about all that we can handle of him. But as far as God running our lives.

It's a big no no. And that is what the bible says sin is. And all of us are guilty of that. I set myself up as God.

Even though I may not admit it. But when I try to do God's job my way. There's bound to be trouble. We know don't we. We don't relate to each other properly. Relationships break down with so much pain.

[ 11 : 39 ] We don't relate to ourselves properly. And we don't relate to the world properly. You may think. Well so what. Ok I'm not perfect. But I'm happy.

I've never murdered anyone. I'm alright. The problem is this. Sin matters to God. God is the affronted one. And he's the boss.

And he holds us rightfully accountable. He's the just judge. And one day we will have to face him. And give an account of our lives. And he's not a God who can simply turn a blind eye to the world. Just imagine that. Colonel Gaddafi gets up to heaven. And he says to God. Hi God. Have you still got that luxury apartment? That's so. That is so unbelievable isn't it?

And then God would say. Come in. That's alright. Welcome. Take the next mansion next to Hitler. How unjust. He'd say no, no, no.

[ 12 : 41 ] And it's the same with our sin. We're not homicidal maniacs are we? I hope we're not. But we're just as guilty as charged. And the punishment is death. And the punishment is death.

Not just physical but spiritual. To be permanently separated from God forever. Well hang on you second. I thought Christmas was about good news. I came to the cow's service to sing good cows and to be cheered up.

What's all this stuff about sin? Well unless we see the dire situation that you and I are in. Then we won't appreciate what God has done. What does Paul say?

He says this. Just look at it again with me. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. He came to save people like you and me. He came to get us out of the dire situation that we are in.

And how did he do it? Well he did it on a cross. The baby on the manger was heading from day one for the cross. And it was on the cross that Jesus hung there.

[ 13 : 41 ] Taking the punishment that you and I deserve. For our rebellion against God. Jesus took the punishment that we deserve. So that we can be right with God.

A few years ago. Probably about 12 years ago now. A man before the parachute jumped out of the plague. But as soon as he left out he knew there was a problem. He tagged on the ripcord but

nothing happened.

He was hurtling towards the ground with no working parachute facing certain death. However strapped to the man's back was his instructor. The instructor was jumping with the man because he was a novice.

It was the guy's first jump. And realising that they were in trouble. The instructor managed to swivel himself round. Under the tummy of the novice.

That he would hit the ground first. So when they eventually did hit the ground. The instructor bore the brunt of the impact. And he was killed instantly. But the novice escaped death.

[ 14 : 40 ] The instructor gave his life. So that the novice could live. And to a far greater extent. That is the wonder of Christmas.

That is what Jesus has done. He died on the cross. To take the punishment. That we deserve. For our rebellion against God. Now do you see why the Christian faith.

Why Christianity is actually a rescue religion. You too can be saved. From an eternity separated from God.

And he's gone to extraordinary lengths. To rescue you. And that is why Christmas is just the best news. That is why it's a celebration. Because it's when we remember that Jesus Christ came into the world.

To save sinners. That we can celebrate. And that leaves us with one final question for Paul. The final question is this. How should I respond? And Paul tells us.

[ 15 : 37 ] Doesn't he? Look what it says. He says here is a trustworthy saying. That deserves full acceptance. He says two things. First of all he says that it's trustworthy. It's the easiest thing in the world isn't it?

At Christmas time. To think that Jesus Christ is just exactly the same as Santa Claus. And many of us think. Because Father Christmas is just one of those lovely Christmas stories.

So is the story about Jesus. Both are taken to be methodized. But Jesus and Santa Claus are very different aren't they? Jesus is historical.

His words and his life are historical. They can be checked out. They can be tested. And if you don't believe it tonight. Do some investigating. What we've heard tonight is trustworthy. And Paul gives us a stamp of authority.

Take one of these gospels. They're on their ways to grow. Take one. Read it over Christmas. Check it out. But secondly Paul says. He says and it deserves full acceptance.

[ 16 : 41 ] This good news. Is that the kid has come in person to save us. That is the best Christmas gift of all. Christmas is about a rescue mission.

There is no better news. And it is something that deserves to be received with joy. There is the offer tonight. A friendship. With the God who made you.

And forgiveness. With the God that you have offended. It's on the table. On the table. Well do you want to receive that gift? Do you want to know it for yourself?

Well it's possible. Maybe tonight you're thinking. There's loads of questions. This is new to me. Or I want to check this out. Do take it gospel. We're running a course in January.

Which is really a seven week course. Just exploring the Christian faith. We'd love you to come on it. You've got nothing to lose. It's worth coming on it tonight. It'll probably be on a Monday evening.

[ 17 : 40 ] And you'd be welcome to come and ask any question that you want. Or somebody from the church. Or fire us an email. And we'd love you to go on it. But maybe actually tonight you've heard enough. And you want to receive this great gift.

And you can do it tonight. What does it need to be? Well it needs to be accepted. It's not like any gift. It's a simple matter. Becoming a Christian. Of saying sorry. Saying thank you. And saying please.

And saying please. Saying sorry to God. That I've ignored you. And that I've tried to live my life. Without any reference to you. And it's saying thank you.

It's saying thank you to Jesus. Who came into this world. To save a sinful rebel like me. And it's saying please. It's saying please God.

Forgive me. And give me a fresh start. And the amazing thing is. If you will do that. If you will say sorry to God. For how you've lived.

[ 18 : 43 ] And if you will say thank you to God. For his gift of his son. The Lord Jesus Christ. Who died on the cross in your place. And if you will say please forgive me. And if you will mean it.

He will do that for you tonight. And if you will say no. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Amen.