

John 1 v1-14

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[0 : 00] In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made, without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

There came a man who was sent from God. His name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe.

He himself was not the light. He came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognise him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. Children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision, but born of God. The word became flesh, and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

[1 : 21] I wonder what Christmas means to you. Maybe you look forward to it. It's a time to spend with family. Those family meal times that seem to last forever.

Those Monopoly games that certainly seem to last forever. And you look forward to that. And you look forward to catching up with old friends, getting the cards, going to the parties. But for others, this time of you won't be so good with it.

Perhaps it stirs unhappy memories. For some, it's a time of loneliness and unhappiness. Perhaps it's the first Christmas without a loved one. But if the statistics are to be believed, then Christmas is actually a pretty expensive and stressful time.

Last year, the average person in the UK spent 15 hours looking for Christmas presents, made five separate shopping trips, walked over 20 miles in pursuit of them, and spent two hours queuing to pay.

Office workers spend up to 7 million hours of company time during their Christmas shopping, costing businesses 72 million in the first few weeks of December.

[2 : 29] On average, each household will spend approximately £160 on food and drink, £660 on gifts, £30 on cards and postage, and £75 on the tree and decorations.

It is no surprise, is it, to find that for a majority of people, they find Christmas more stressful than going to the dentist. Indudely, a majority of women say it's the most stressful time of the year, though 70% say it's the most enjoyable time of the year.

Work that out if you can. Well, with all the preparation, and all the expense that Christmas brings for many of us, it's little wonder, is it, that the Christmas story, the message at the heart of Christmas, gets sidelined or forgotten.

With so much else going on, and so many other things for us to worry about, the Christmas story really is a bit of a tack on, isn't it? For us to think about. And the temptation is to think, well, it's a nice story that warms the heart, I just haven't got time.

Or it's a nice story for Christians to remember. But really, it's got no relevance to me in the 21st century. But this morning, I want to show you, that the Christmas message is actually the most important message that you will ever hear.

[3 : 43] You see, the Bible's claim is actually this Christmas message is more important than world peace. It's more important than finding a cure for cancer.

It's more important than the examiner's verdict on your exam paper. It's more important than the bank manager's assessment of your mortgage application. It's more important than the doctor's

news on your test results.

Actually, nothing could be more important than what we're going to hear in the next few minutes. Because what is contained in the words that I just read, are the most serious, are the most wonderful news in the world.

And our response, and your response, not only affects your life, but it affects your eternal destiny. And that is how important the Christmas message is. I know it's a bold claim to make.

So let me explain it to you. And let me see, first of all, that we have a royal scandal. If you look at John chapter 1, verses 1 to 14, while I read you, while I blow my nose.

[4 : 47] So let's see, first of all, a royal scandal. Now we are quite used to, aren't we? Our royal scandals. You know how it is. You know those conspiracy theories about Diana?

Rumours abound, aren't they, of her assassination? That it was actually the British Secret Service? That she was unhappy that she was about to marry Tony Fyre? That is the sort of royal scandal we're used to.

Or Prince Andrew flying a helicopter somewhere that he shouldn't, or having a round of golf on something that he shouldn't. We're used to royal scandals. But John tells us in the Gospel about a royal scandal with a difference.

This passage is read all around the globe, but it's probably the least understood. You'll see in verse 1, John is talking about somebody called the Word. And we find out later in chapter 1, that that Word is Jesus.

And John makes an extraordinary claim about Jesus in the first verses. Let's read verse 1. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

[5 : 55] He was with God in the beginning. Do you see the extraordinary claims that this Word, Jesus, is God himself. Jesus is actually God.

The Word was God. And he's been there from the very beginning. If you like, Jesus is all that needs to be said about anything, because he's God himself.

John goes on, doesn't he? He says, through him all things were made. Without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of man. This Jesus is the one who made all things.

He is the one who gives life to all people. So John is saying, very simply, Jesus is God. He's been there from the start. And he's responsible for the creation of the universe, and everything and everyone in it.

He is God. But then comes the most amazing verse in the passage, and that is in the last paragraph. Do you see it? The Word became flesh.

[7 : 02] And made his dwelling amongst us. We have seen his glory. The glory of the one and only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

This God, who made all things, who was there right at the start of time, actually takes on human flesh. And he becomes a man.

God becomes one of us in the person of Jesus Christ. And that is the remarkable truth of the Christmas story. That snuggled into that rough cradle was the living God himself in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Word. I remember once I was speaking at a school CU, there was six formers, and one bright spark put up his hand before I'd even started speaking, and said, show me God. Show us God. Well, I've got to admit, at that point, I'm a little bit stumped, aren't I? Even I can't do that. But I did say to him, actually, you could have met God if you'd have been living at the right time. You could have met God in the flesh if you'd have been around at the right time, which slightly threw him until I explained who Jesus was.

[8 : 09] But you'd expect, wouldn't you, that if Christ, if God were to come to town, then surely everybody would accept him joyfully. Everyone would bow before him as the great God of the universe.

But actually, that is not what happened. According to John, in verse 5, John tells us that the light, that is Jesus, shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

Do you see that? He shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. At the end of the first paragraph. And again, verse 11, he says that Jesus came to his own, but his own did not receive him.

Darkness, in John's gospel, it represents humanity's opposition to God. It's a picture of the who of all human race. And you see, the Bible's understanding is that you and I were made by God for God.

That is why you exist. We were made for something better, a relationship with God, which is the best that we could possibly want. But some of this, we don't want it, do we? We don't want a relationship with God, and we prefer to self-rule.

[9 : 21] We prefer to be kings of our own lives. Jesus tells us later in the book that people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.

And if we do cry out to God, well it's very much on our own terms, isn't it? And very much in our own timing. You may have heard the rubbish story about the atheist who was being chased by a big black bear.

And as the bear was getting closer to him, he could feel the breath of the bear in his neck. And the atheist was still as stubborn as a mule, he didn't want to compromise his own position, so he decided to ask God if he existed to make the bear a Christian.

So he shouted out to God, God if you exist and if it's possible, please put, please make this bear into a Christian. Just at that moment, the atheist tripped over a log and fell and was concussed. The bear came to him, picked him up very gently in his clothes and raised him up to heaven and said, for what we are about to receive, may the Lord make us through the blood. Now that is very kind of your love.

[10 : 23] But the scandal is this, we treat God exactly like that. We call on him on our terms, but the rest of the time we ignore it. And actually, that is deeply offensive to God, isn't it?

It is deeply offensive to the God of the universe. For he loves us and he cares for us. And our willful rejection of him and his standards demand that we stand before him and we give account.

And the uncomfortable news that I've got to tell you this morning is that we're all guilty. That every one of us, no matter how good we think we are, because if God's standards of goodness are 100%, well, we know we haven't met them.

It's God's standards that really matter. But you know the even more scandalous thing? The thing that makes Christmas a right royal scandal is that God was willing to come into our filthy, mucked up world and do something about the mess that you and I have created.

The scandal that he loves the world so much that despite our treatment of him, he is still willing to deal with us lovingly. When quite rightly and fairly he could wipe the human race out from the earth.

[11 : 41] But he doesn't. He comes into our world. He feels our pain. He lives our life. He experiences our hurt and our sorrows. He takes on human flesh to such a degree that no one can ever accuse him of not knowing what this world is like.

The word became flesh. God came to earth. And that is a royal scandal. Secondly, I want to show you from this passage a royal pardon. A royal pardon.

Why should God go to all that trouble to come into the world which you and I have mucked up? Why did he do that? Well that brings us secondly to a royal pardon.

The second amazing fact contained in this passage. The truth is that Christmas is a rescue mission. A royal pardon is offered to you and me so that we could be forgiven by God.

And we could live with him as our friend and as our king. Now we've just seen that human beings like you and I have got a real problem. We are rebels against our maker.

[12 : 49] We deserve not his love but actually if truth be told we deserve his condemnation. That is the problem. So what is the solution?

Is there a solution? If you've got a problem it's vital as much of the right solution. I read this week Qantas Airlines the Australian airline and they've got a policy that whereby after every flight pilots fill out a form that tell the mechanics what is the problem with the aircraft.

And the mechanics correct the problem as they bring the solution. And they document their repairs on the form. And so before the next flight the next time a pilot flies that aircraft the pilot has a sheet which shows them the problem and the solution.

Here are some actual maintenance reports submitted by Qantas pilots and solutions recorded by maintenance workers. Problem Left inside main tyre almost needs replacement.

Solution almost replaced left inside main tyre. Problem evidence of leak on right main landing gear. Solution evidence removed.

[14:02] Problem number three engine missing. Solution engine found on right wing after brief search. Problem aircraft handles funny. Solution aircraft warned to straighten up fly right and be serious.

Problem mouse in cockpit. Solution cat installed. Problem noise coming from under instrument panel sounds like a midget pounding on something with a hammer. Solution took hammer away from midget.

Now you've got to administer the right solution to the problem. So what is God's solution? What is God's solution to solve this most basic problem? Your most basic problem? Well the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ that's what Christmas is all about. Jesus Christ coming into the world is an act of extraordinary love and sacrifice and his coming means that you and I can be made right with God that you and I can be forgiven.

Do you see what John says? He says yet to all at the end of the third paragraph that last sentence yet to all who received him to those who believe in his name he gave the right to become children of God.

[15:17] Children born not of natural descent nor of human decision or a husband's will but born of God. What John is saying is that at the coming of Jesus it makes it possible for you and I to become children of God.

How can we become part of his family again? How is that possible? How can God welcome us back into his arms given all that we've done to him?

But what John goes on to describe in the rest of his book is that this child born in a manger grew up and willingly died on the cross. Christmas cannot be understood without Easter.

The manger leads to the cross and on the cross Jesus pours the penalty that you and I deserve for our wrongdoing. God in himself in the person of Jesus Christ willingly paid for the crimes that you and I have committed against him.

It means that if we accept his rescue mission on our behalf if we admit our wrongdoing and we ask him for forgiveness we can go free we can become children of God. We will be forgiven this morning for whatever we've done.

[16:32] We can receive God's royal pardon we can know that God was made us personally we can begin to live the life live life the way that God has intended it to be lived with him as our Lord and as our King.

But it all depends on how you respond to the Son the Lord Jesus Christ the Word of God. Some time ago during the second one a famous American art collector learnt that his son had been killed in action saving the life of another soldier.

The following Christmas the soldier who survived who was rescued was himself an amateur painter and he gave the old art collector a portrait he sketched of his son. It was nothing like a masterpiece at all but it became very special to the old man and his loneliness.

Not long afterwards the art collector died and his paintings were to be auctioned according to his will on Christmas day. To everyone's surprise the auction began with a painting that no one had ever heard of or seen it was the painting of the art collector's son.

Who would open with a hundred dollars the auctioneer said nothing was offered. It was suggested that they move on but the auctioneer said no he was adamant we must sell this painting first.

[17:53] Eventually a friend of this old man not a collector and not very rich offered a small son. I knew the boy he said so I'd like to have it. Will anyone really hire the auctioneer asked there was silence so the auctioneer said going once going twice gone.

There was a huge sigh of relief around the room as people hoped they could now get on with the real auction the real business. But the auctioneer stood up looked at the audience and declared the auction was over. There was stunned disbelief.

It's very simple said the auctioneer according to the will of the father whoever takes the son gets all. You see the fact of our future of your future and my future of your destiny and my destiny of whether we are with God or whether we are apart from him for all eternity in hell depends on our response to the son to the Lord Jesus Christ.

And that is why the Christmas message is the most important message you will ever hear. It's a message about a royal scandal that God should come into this world into this mucked up world and still be bothered with you and I.

And he is offering each one of us this morning a royal pardon to live life his way the right way. And my job this morning is to urge you very simply this Christmas time to think seriously about this message.

[19 : 22] Because if your doctor gave you tough news you would listen. And if your bank manager gave you a grim assessment of your finances you would listen. And God speaks to you this morning and he tells you what he's done through his word the Bible and you must listen.

For to ignore him is folly is madness is foolishness in the extreme. So why not? We've got a course starting in January called Christian Explored It's all about helping explain the message of the Christian faith.

Why don't you do it? You've got nothing to lose. You've got everything to gain. You can speak to me afterwards. You can talk to the person next to you and ask them. You can send an email. But for some this morning you might want to take this opportunity to get right with the living God even now because that is perfectly possible.

He longs for you to come home to him even today. We've been confessing our faith through this year.

Really that means telling each other what we believe. And we're going through the Lord's prayer and maybe you want to use this prayer that's written on your sheet. You'll see it. What is the fifth request of the Lord's prayer?

[20 : 48] It means forgive us our debts. Forgive us our sins. Forgive us our trespasses, God. As he's also forgiven our debt. It means because of Christ's blood, because Jesus died on the cross, you and I can be forgiven.

Do not hold against us, poor sinners, that we are any of the sins we do or the evil that constantly trances. Forgive us.

just as we are fully determined as evidence of your grace in us to forgive our neighbours. I'll ask the question and you as the congregation respond by giving the answer.

What does the fifth request mean? Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debts.

Please, because of Christ's blood, do not hold against us, poor sinners that we are.

any of the sins we do or the evil that constantly trances us. Forgive us just as we are fully determined as evidence of your graciousness to forgive our needs.

[21 : 56] Let's pray. Let's pray. Thank you.