

P Levy Christmas Day 25-12-2014

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[0 : 0 0] So, it's not normally like this, that's what I was going to say. So this week I was looking at the book, I don't think the people are here, but some people! love a book called The Languages of Love. Do you know this book? By Gary Chapman. I'm not a great fan of it if I'm honest, but they love it. So I was looking through it in the endless hunt for illustrations. And there's different kinds of people here this morning, aren't there? There's the person whose love language is gifts. That's probably me really. It doesn't matter what it is, as long as it's wrapped up. I'm happy. So Christmas is a great time of year. I love it. There are other people whose language of love is words of encouragement.

Do you know those kind of people? So if somebody gives them a gift and gives them a handwritten card, they unbelievably prefer the handwritten card to the gift. There are others out there whose language of love, I'm not really convinced of all this, but their language of love is hugs. You know, physical affection. So as long as you don't break away from the hug too soon, they know that they love that they're okay. There are those out there, like my wife, who are very unfortunately, their language of love is acts of service. It's the worst possible language of love to speak. So you've got to be in the garden or doing chores for them to feel loved.

It's the one language of love that you can't fake. That's what I've discovered. You just can't fake it. And love is spelt out in different ways, isn't it? Love is spelt out in different ways. I don't know whether you agree with that or not. But Christmas is also spelt out in different ways. So when I was about seven or eight, I was given the job of writing the cards for our family. And so which is my spy handwritten. And I discovered after about the third card, you could shorten Christmas, couldn't you? You could shorten Christmas to X-mas.

And so on about 200 cards, going out to people all over the world, I wrote happy X-mas from the Levy's. When then my father panned out. And it all kicked off with him chasing me around the house and having to buy new guns. Because my father, as a Christian minister, can't stand the word X-mas. Because it's really wrong. You're taking Christ out of Christmas. I actually don't agree. I don't mind it. It's not a big deal to me. Because Christmas often gets abbreviated to X-mas. And actually it's not a new idea. So if you look at the very important historical source Wikipedia, you will find that X-mas has been around for about a thousand years.

[2 : 4 5] And actually it's not particularly unchristian. And people say, well, my dad would say, you're taking Christ out of Christmas. But just think about it with me this morning. If you had to substitute Christ for a letter, which one would it be? If you had to substitute Christ for a letter, which one would it be? It would be X. X would be the one. And we all abbreviate, don't we? We don't say, how was the operation? We say, how was the op? Your name might be Christopher, but we call you Chris. You don't go to the public house, do you? You go to the pub. So we shorten things. So my argument to my dad is, why not Christmas? And if you're going to put a letter in front of mass instead of Christ, I think X is the perfect letter.

Because it gets to the heart of what Christmas is about. So I'm going to give you four reasons really briefly. The first one's a bit longer, the other three are really short. Four reasons why X-mas actually isn't that bad and helps you understand Christmas. So kids, when do you get, first reason, when do you get X's and crosses at school? When do you get X's and X's and crosses at school? When do you get it? Marius? When you do maths. Is it when you get things right in maths? The, like, um, the right time? Yeah. So is it when you get things right or when you get things wrong? When does the teacher write it? Is it when you get it right or when you get it wrong? Yes. You get it wrong. So I remember very well. Isn't it? What do you think, Zoe? I remember when I was free when I was like, um, when we get maths wrong and, um, you know, normally I sometimes I'm like, normally I sometimes I just don't get it wrong. Yeah, we do, don't we? There's no need for confession, but it's

alright.

But it is, isn't it? It's when we get things wrong. Okay? And so you might find, isn't it, there are more crosses and ticks on your work. I often find that. And X-mas reminds me of that. I want you to see that. The reason that God came into this world, do you know why?

Because we didn't love him properly. Because we've done things wrong. And we don't love others, do we. And the reason why the Lord Jesus came into this world is because we've made a mess of this world. We know that. Now Christmas Day is the day when we're at our best, isn't it? You look at your best this morning. But by the end of today, I am going to have to go to my God and I'm going to have to say I'm sorry for this and for this and for this. Because today I will get it wrong. As will you, whether you're willing to admit it or not.

The word sin simply means to fall short of God's standard. And from the Bible we read that that is the reason Christ Jesus came into the world. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Which is not like a part of who we are, just a little bit of who we are.

[6 : 02] It's what we are. It's all of who we are. There is no us and them this morning. It is all of us are sinners. But that means we've got to admit that we're sinners. That we've fallen short of God's standard. And that's not easy, is it? And what Jesus, when he did, he kind of sat at a kind of human exam. And the human exam that Jesus lived, he lived every moment of every day perfectly. He never got to the end of the day and Jesus had to go to God and say sorry. He never had to do that. He always loved God and he always loved others. And so by the time he lived his 33 years on earth, he got a 100% mark. And if you become a Christian, and if you are a Christian, there is this amazing exchange, isn't there? There's this amazing exchange that takes place. His mark of perfection becomes your mark. And your bad mark goes to Jesus when he went to the cross. So if you follow Jesus this morning, God sees you as a straight

A star student. Some of the young people in this church get all straight stars. There are many of us who never got A's or B's, let alone A stars. And it is a wonderful thing that God sees you as a perfect follower of his if you are in Christ, if you follow Christ, if you believe in Christ.

Jesus stood in your place. I was hearing this week of somebody that I know, somebody who was an identical twin. And he was sitting an entrance exam for university and he didn't think that he'd pass. He shouldn't have done this, but he got his identical twin brother who was brighter than him to sit the exam for him. His brother passed the exam, but of course the result was transferred to him. Now in the end he finally admitted once he got into the university he was doing the wrong thing. But you know what? That helps us understand a little bit what Jesus did. Jesus sat the exam for me. He lived the life that I should have lived. And now if I follow Jesus, I get his perfect mark. The hymn says this, upon a life I have not lived, upon a death I did not die, another's life, another's death, I've stayed my whole eternity.

You may be here this morning and you think, ah, come on, I used to come here for Christmas morning to hear how bad I am. Am I really that bad? Well, do you know what you're really like? If you want to understand what you're like, I want to say it's those times when you don't get what you want. What do you do with those gifts that you don't like and you're disappointed with? It still happens to us sometimes as adults. But it happens to us more as children.

[9 : 09] There's a great video on YouTube. If we were the kind of church that played videos on YouTube, I would play you it, but let me describe it to you. It's from one of the late night shows in America, where the host got parents to tell their children that they were allowed to open one Christmas present a few weeks early. But instead of a good present, he asked the parents to put there in the present something that the children really didn't like. I wrapped it up nicely so it looked like a beautiful present. And then they would open it and the parents would video their reaction and put it on YouTube with the title, Hey Jimmy Kimmel, I gave my kid a terrible present. And a lot of people did it. So I was spending a little bit of research on this this week. There are hundreds of videos saying, Hey Jimmy Kimmel, I gave my kid a terrible present. And so the parents set it up. They're allowing you to open one present early. And a number of the kids react very, very poorly. Watch it later this afternoon. They are very, very funny. Let me give you some of their reactions.

One cried, one three-year-old cried whilst holding olive oil with tears running down his face saying, I don't like this. Two sisters who were given by their father a battery and a red onion stamped their feet and said it's not fair. One young eight-year-old boy, when he opened his present to find a girls' activity colouring book, said with his lip quivering, It's the worst Christmas ever.

So when I checked last night, there is a whole world of these videos. There are literally hundreds of them. Some of them have got hundreds of thousands of views. I don't know what's worse.

Is it worse to see the kids' reaction? Is it worse than the fact that parents put them on the internet? Or is it the fact that people like me have watched loads of them? I don't know. But one of the things that the X reminds us in Xmas is that when push comes to shove, we need someone to save us from ourselves. We really do. The second reason why I love the X in Xmas is that you know when you get a letter or you get a text from somebody that you love and they sign their name. What do you put after them? What do they put after their name? What do they put after their name? X's and O's. What's the O's for? Do you know one of those? I didn't know one of the O's.

Hugs, isn't it? Hugs. I'm doing really shouting hugs. But you get X to X and you're out. I had a kiss, isn't it? And we send that to people that we love. And one of the things that Xmas reminds us is this. God loves us. It's one of the great messages of Christmas.

[11:49] John 3.16 we have it that God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever would believe in him will not perish but have eternal life. God so loved the world.

God so loved the world that he gave his son. He only had one son to give. And he gave him so that whoever would believe on him would not perish but have eternal life. And so it doesn't matter what you've done. It doesn't matter what you've become. You will not perish if you believe in him and have everlasting life. God cannot have displayed his love anymore than when he gave his son. He pays the debt for you. God's love language is all of those things we talked about at the start. But it's supremely this act of service in sending his own son. A couple of years ago I was at a conference in Scotland and I took some friends out for dinner.

We went to Jamie's Kitchen which is just in Glasgow. It's just opposite where that terrible incident was this week. And at the end of the meal I went to pay and the bill. And the waitress said to me the bill has already been paid. I said no it can't be. She says it's been paid. I went back to the table and I said did one of you boys pay? And they said no we haven't paid. And the waitress said somebody else must have paid for you. An anonymous donor. I said that's incredible. I've heard about this. I've read articles about this. I've seen it but I've never ever experienced it. I felt amazing. I felt the love. It was £70 that I didn't have to pay for. And it was paid for. That moment lasted for about four minutes. She came back and she said we've made a mistake. And we put the bill on the wrong side. And it's still to be paid. I can tell you if I'd have seen Jamie Oliver that night I'd have kept the living day. I liked the joy. I felt the love but it passed.

But you know what? The X in Xmas reminds me that God so loved me. The Lord Jesus Christ he loved me and he gave himself for me. The debt has been paid. And I am forgiven. But it will only come through the Lord Jesus. Which means that the third X reminds me that I've had a fork in the road. She said I've had a fork in the road. And everyone hearing this this morning is at that fork in the road. Even if it's for the first time. So you get a choice this Christmas day. You get a choice to run down that road or that road. And that road is running my life my way until I die. And I'm in charge. Ignoring what Jesus did. And no forgiveness. Or I can go down that road. Or I can go down that road. Where I put my trust in him. And I enjoy forgiveness forever. But it is not automatic. And that's what the fourth X reminds me of. You know if you're at the end of a document. And they put a little

[15:17] X don't they? And they say sign here. And it's a little reminder to you and I that no matter what Jesus has done it is not automatic. And you need to receive it. And you need to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. And you need to sign off. And you need to commit. And you need to say yes to him. And you need to surrender to him. And you need to receive the gift. And I really pray that this Christmas that for each and every one of us not only will we celebrate each other and enjoy the gifts which we should do. But if you've not done it yet. That before this Christmas day is over. That you'll turn your heart to Jesus and say Jesus save me. I love you. Thank you for dying on the cross to save me. And I want to follow you. And I wonder particularly the children in this church. I would really love you children if you will listen to me for just half a minute. I would love you just to talk to your mum and dad about this today. Would you do that for me? Maybe tonight before you go to bed. You've had wonderful wonderful gifts today. I'm sure of it. And yet the most important gift of all is the Lord Jesus Christ. My brother became a Christian. My brother Dave became a

Christian on Christmas day when he was eight years old. During one of the most boring the most boring times. In some ways there's no better day though isn't there? There is no better day than to sign on and to say Lord Jesus save me. Forgive me. Xmas reminds me that you love me Lord.

Xmas reminds me of a cross. Xmas reminds me that there is a fork in the road. And Xmas reminds me that I need to sign on. I wonder whether you'd ask just one question. What did you think of this morning's sermon over lunch or tea or EastEnders? Let's pray.