

John 1:12

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[0 : 00] Well let me add my word of welcome to Rubens. It's great to have you with us today.! Children it's a great day isn't it? And parents you have made it. You have made it. Not long to go. Keep going.

Today is a day for being thankful isn't it? And we need to say thank you to different people in the church. Thank you very much to the musicians who've served us so well over the last weeks. They've worked really hard. Thank you to those who've served in the kitchen. Endless mince pies and mulled wine. Greeters who've got the difficult job of kind of ordering you about when you don't want to be ordered about.

And to the PA team and the audio visual guys we want to say thank you. We only have a no duty when things go wrong. So thank you very very much. I don't know whether you saw there was an article in the Telegraph on the weekend that priests have been told to edit popular carols this Christmas in order to avoid causing unnecessary offence.

The article said quite why you would be in church to begin with if you found Christianity so offensive has not been made clear. Do you see many vegans in butchers demanding to talk to the managers?

[1 : 17] Last time you were down the pub did you notice any teetotallers raging at the landlord about his disgusting wall of booze? Yet according to a whistleblower vicar in the Church of England, clergy across the country have been contacted and urged to alter various Advent hymns to avoid upset.

Those singled out as particularly concerning are O Come, O Come Emmanuel for depicting other faiths as being outside of God's grace. And lo he comes with clouds descending.

The clergy have been sent a link to research suggesting the second verse contains problematic words by stating Jesus is the true Messiah. In a further email sent to the Birmingham Diocese, clergy were advised to try to use language that won't add further confusion or tension or take away from anything, anything from the good news of the Nativity.

One of the things I love about the Bible is its simplicity and its beautiful clarity. I want to speak to you from one verse that every single one of you will be able to understand that won't add further confusion.

It might well add tension, but it certainly won't take anything away from the good news. The verse is John 1 verse 12. John 1 verse 12, let me read it to you.

[2 : 35] Little words, aren't they?

As many as received him, to them he gave the right to become the children of God, even to them who believe on his name. I want to give you three brief things, all beginning with P.

I want to give you a picture, a person, and a promise. That's easy to remember, isn't it? Somebody says, and what did you learn in church this morning? A picture, a person, and a promise.

And the verse, as I read it, do you see it? It is about receiving, and about entrusting, and about being given the right to become the children of God.

It's about a change of name. And so the picture I want to give you is a picture of a young couple getting married. You may have seen it happen.

[3 : 46] It may have happened to you, getting married. You know what it's like, isn't it? We've all been to weddings. The young couple stand at the front of the church before the minister who's going to conduct the service, and the question is asked, will you have this woman to be your wedded wife?

I will. Will you have this man? I will. And in most weddings, that is followed by the giving of a ring. I give you this ring. I will is followed by I give. I will is followed by I give.

And becoming a Christian is just like that. Except it's not you and the bride and groom. It is you and the Lord Jesus. Will you have this man?

Will you trust him? Will you receive him? I will. Will. And there's this dual relationship of receiving Jesus and entrusting ourselves back to him.

[5 : 04] Receiving and entrusting ourselves to him. If I said to you, I'm after the service, I'm your visitor. If I said to him, are you married?

And you replied, well, I think so. Or I hope so. And if your wife was within your shot, you'd be in all sorts of trouble, wouldn't you?

You'd be in dire trouble. Have you stood with her and said, I will and I give? Have you received from her and entrusted yourself to her?

Have you been there? Well, you know if you have, don't you? And so let me ask you the question. Have you been to the Lord Jesus? Who we've sung about and have read about and we meet in his name? And have you received him?

[6 : 09] Accepted him and entrusted yourself back to him? That is the picture. And he is the person. This is what we say Christianity is all about.

I have a friend who would describe himself as a churchgoer. He's a churchgoer who I, in all my friendship with him, I've never known him actually go to church. He says this, I don't go as often as I wish, but I do go as often as I can.

Which, in my friendship with him, has been never. He was ill and then I saw him after he'd been ill. He told me that his neighbour from three doors down appeared with a lawnmower and cut his grass for him.

And he said, that's what I call being a real Christian. Turns out the man who cut the grass was an atheist. And my friend will say if somebody doing a good deed, maybe taking someone to hospital, that's what I call a real Christian.

Drives me nuts. But we get there, don't we? Maybe you get there. You confuse being a Christian with doing good. Or being good.

[7 : 20] Or trying hard. Or not hurting anybody. And that awful one where people say, well, I've done my best.

Which we only ever say when we've not done our best, don't we? Can you see from our verse, being a Christian is receiving Jesus.

It is a person-to-person relationship. Christmas is about God in the person of his son, the Lord Jesus, entering into his creation so that you and I can have a relationship with him.

So that you and I can be forgiven. So that you and I can be brought into his family. There is a baby in the manger who is Christ the Lord.

And it is good news of great joy. God contracted to a span. Incomprehensibly made man. The word who spoke creation into being, that word has become flesh.

[8 : 28] He was poor that he might make us rich. He was born of a virgin that we might be born of God. He took our flesh that he might give us his spirit. He lay in the manger that you may lie in paradise.

He came down from heaven that he might bring you to heaven. That the ancient of days should be born. That he who thunders in the heavens should cry in the cradle.

That he who rules the stars should suck the breast. That a virgin should conceive. That Christ should be made of a woman. And of that woman which himself had made.

That the branch should bear the vine. That the mother should be younger than the child she bare. And the child in the womb bigger than the mother. And the human nature should not be God.

Yet one with God. The mystery of the incarnation. Christianity is Christ. There's a beautiful picture of accepting him.

[9 : 29] Christianity is about a person. And thirdly, the promise. Let me read you the verse again. As many as received him. To them he gave the rights to become the children of God.

Even to them who believe on his name. What a promise. Children. Connected. By parentage. Parents and children. There's an unbreakable relationship. Isn't there? That can never be undone. And so. Think about it with me.

A parent. A parent. Might become. A shame of a child. A child. Might become. A shame of a parent. A child.

Believe it or not. Might be embarrassed by their parents. Can you believe that? A parent. Can become. Can become really frustrated. With their kids. A child.

[10:32] Can become. Exasperated. With their mum and dad. But nothing can undo that relationship. You are all. The child.

Of someone. Nothing can undo that relationship. What this verse is telling us. Is that when we receive.

The Lord Jesus Christ. When we entrust ourselves. Back to him. He brings us. Into an. Unchanging. Irreversible. Unbreakable. Relationship. With God.

And the amazing truth is this. That not even death. Can. Undo that relationship. The end of his life. When Jesus is dying. On the cross. The man. On the next door cross.

The one. That we call the dying thief. Turned to Jesus. And said. Lord. Remember me. And Jesus replied. It's one of the most important things. In the Bible. He didn't say. To that dying thief.

[11:27] On the cross. He didn't say. Actually. You've never been to church. So you can't get into heaven. He didn't say. Actually. You've not been baptized. Or you've not even been confirmed.

He didn't say. You're not religious enough. As if. They were the entrance. Into heaven. All the man did. Wasn't he? All the man did. Was say. Jesus.

Remember me. And Jesus said. Today. You will be with me. In paradise. All the man did.

Was. Receive Jesus. And believe. In his name. And he was brought. Into the family of God. And it's that sort of.

Unbreakable. Irreversible relationship. That Jesus. Sets up something. That guarantees. Our eternity. However long. Your life may be. Eternity.

[12:23] Is forever. Isn't it? And eternity. Is a very long time. To spend in the wrong place. Whatever problems. You might face on earth. The great crunch problem.

Is on its way. Isn't it? And none of us. Can evade it. All of us. Will one day die. And Christianity. Is the only religion. In the world. That will teach you.

How to die. Without being afraid. Today. You will be with me. In paradise. Jesus can say to you. And of course you will.

Because if you've. Come to Jesus. And received him. And given yourself. Back to him. And so to speak. You are married to him. He belongs to you. And you belong to him. And we're safe.

And we're safe for all eternity. The great transaction. Has taken place. And we have been made. Children of God. In Jesus. As we receive him.

[13:19] And entrust ourselves to him. We become the children of God. And so it's very very simple. On this Christmas day. Can you see the picture? Will you take this man?

Will you take this Lord Jesus? This morning? Will you receive him? And entrust yourself to him? Will you ponder the person?

Will you be amazed at the person? This Christmas day. Of God made man. The creator who enters into creation. And will you cling to the promise?

And rejoice in it. As many as received him. To them he gave the right. To become the children of God. Even to them who believe.

On his name. Let's pray.