

Talk – Christmas Unboxed

Talk Workings

Topic: Jesus - a baby who grew to be a man - the Saviour of the world.

Issue: We hear about the birth Jesus every Christmas - what about Jesus makes my life better?

Argument/Central Truth (*for a specific point*): The gift of Jesus makes life better.

Illustration

- Use a gift-wrapped box – to show to gift of Christmas.
- Unwrap the Box to explain each point

Talk 1

Title: Why Christmas is so Special (Part 1)

Bible Readings:

Isaiah 7:13-17

Isaiah 9:1-7

Matthew 1:18-25

Talk 2

Title: What about Christmas makes life better? (Part 2)

Bible Reading:

Colossians 1:15-23

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CHECK TIME

Talk 1

Christmas Traditions (*get attention, set up topic, raise issue, promise answer, outline talk - 3-5 mins*)

- Happy Christmas everyone.
- What are your Christmas traditions?
- Growing up, I have very fond memories of waking up on Christmas morning to find a Christmas Tree surrounded by presents which my sisters and I would eagerly eye-off as we waited for my parents to emerge (from what seemed like an eternal slumber).
- And as the wait dragged on, then we would *quietly, make lots of noise* (!) to indicate that we were ready for the parents to wake up to start present-opening proceedings.
- First, we would have to have a cooked breakfast (which as a kid, always felt like torture as what we really wanted to do was get to the presents) – funny how on any other day of the year food would have been our first priority but not on Christmas morning!
- Then finally we would coax our parents to the tree where my father (still in his dressing gown) would hand out the gifts one by one to each of us kids.

- We would start with a Christmas decoration. Each year my mother would give us a decoration which held some meaningful significance which she would attempt to tell us right before present opening began – us kids would feign some kind of interest – while wishing that we could move onto the main event – unwrapping presents.
- Then, finally we would get the presents – each of us eager for the present that was on the top of our list.
- And my Dad would keep us hanging – if there was a present that look suspiciously like that new bike I had been asking for forever, then it was that gift that my Dad would always seems to get to last – extending out my anticipation and stretching my patience levels to what seemed like breaking point.

- And then once the gifts were opened, and when all we wanted to do we start building or playing or riding with the toys that had been given, we were made to sit quietly as we made the obligatory phone calls to relatives around the world!
- No matter where we lived in the World, our traditions stayed the same, and although me may not have realised it at the time – it was those traditions which we kids have kept and now repeat with our own kids.

- What are your Christmas traditions?

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- Friends, for most of us – Presents and Christmas go hand in hand.
- So, what I would like to do for just a few moments is unwrap Christmas with you.
- Each Christmas we hear a lot about presents (perhaps we have spent a lot on presents).
- So first up I want to consider some of the meaningful reasons why Christmas is so special.
- As we are in church, it will surprise no one that as we unwrap Christmas we will talk and sing about the birth and gift of Jesus Christ.

- And then after our next Bible reading, I want to quickly consider what it is about Christmas that makes our life better today.

Unwrapping Christmas

Now to help me do this – I have a present. *[Prop – large square Christmas Present]* This is the size of present which I always wished had my name on it when it came to Christmas morning!

So, three meaningful reasons why Christmas is so special.

First – it is Surprising

[reveal the word 'SURPRISING' under the ribbon on one side of the present]

- I always like Christmas surprises.
- And even though we might each have a usual Christmas traditions, there are times when something out of the ordinary happens that make one Christmas stand out over another.
- My first ten Christmases where in the United States – which means it was winter time.
- I remember the Christmas when the first snow arrived on Christmas Eve so that when we woke up on Christmas morning – and looked out the window all we could see was a white winter wonderland.
- A joyous surprise.
- Has anyone else enjoyed a White Christmas? *[Look for hands]*

- The Christmas that the Bible speaks about is an even bigger surprise.
- The first passage we read tonight was Isaiah 7 – it is a prophecy about the nation of Judah (God's people in the OT) given around 735BC – so more than seven hundred years before that very first Christmas.

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- Isaiah tells the king of Judah (a guy called King Ahaz) – verse 14 – that the Lord will give a sign: *‘The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel’*.
- It is surprising that a virgin will give birth!

- But that is not the only surprising thing here.
- Although this passage is used at many Christmas Church services – it is not, in the first instance, concerned with the baby Jesus being born in a manger.
- It is actually a passage that contains *a surprising promise*.
- King Ahaz who these words are addressed too, is in a fight with the two neighbouring kings – they all led small nations - Ahaz over Judah, Rezin over Aram (modern day Syria) and Pekah over Ephraim (Israel).
- Ahaz hoping to protect himself appeals to the very large superpower of the day – a place called Assyria under King Tiglath-Pileser III (sounds like good name for a beer!).
- Now before your eyes roll back into your heads – let me say that this was like a goldfish, calling upon a white pointer – to help him win a battle against two other goldfish. The only winner in this fight will be the white pointer!

- What is surprising in this passage is that God offers a different strategy and a surprising promise - that he will step in through the son of a virgin - and it will be through that boy that Ahaz and Judah will defeat not just to other goldfish but the white pointer as well!!
- If that comes off that will be a surprise.

- God often steps into world history in very surprising ways and through very surprising means.
- Let me connect that to Christmas in a moment.

PAUSE

The second meaningful reason why Christmas is so special – is that we **look back and look forward**

[reveal the word ‘BACK and FORWARD’ under the ribbon on the next side of the present]

- Christmas is a time of frantic activity. It seems to arrive at a rapid rate, with so much to do and organise, and with so many different people to see.
- And yet somehow when it does arrive, we all seem to take a collective breath – pause – and reflect *back* on the things that are important in our lives. Those we love, and the work that we have done, and the places that we have been.

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- And we look *forward* on what the year ahead might look like, with the dreams and hopes that we have for the new year.
- We reflect back and look forward.

- The second passage we read tonight was Isaiah 9.
- It is a little further on from the first passage that we looked at.
- Things have not gone well for the people of Judah – in fact they ignored what God has said and what God had promised them.
- That big white pointer (which they were told to turn from) has come on in and destroyed the nations around and has in most part overtaken the people of Judah.
- They are in darkness, and gloom and distress – the result of what happens when you turn your back on God.
- And Isaiah stops and *reflects back* on all that he can see before him - and then he *looks forward* and sees a new future for God's people.
- See there in verse 1 '*In the past, he humbled that land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali*' (they are the regions of Judah where the Assyrians had come in and overtaken them) – but '*in the future he will honour Galilee of the Gentiles, by the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan*'
- What Isaiah sees is judgement and destruction in the past followed by a new future for the people of God – one where the people go from living in darkness to seeing a great light.

- Again this is not first and foremost about Christmas, but you can not help to see that the future that God has in store for his people Judah involved a child born to a virgin, who comes to a place called Galilee – and when he comes he brings light to a dark world.

The third meaningful reason why Christmas is so special – is because **it is for everyone.**

[reveal the word 'FOR EVERYONE' under the ribbon on the third side of the present]

- I love it that young or old there always seems to be something in Christmas that we can enjoy and value.
- We see Christmas celebrated across the world in some of the most far flung places.
- Everyone from local councils, to shopping centres, to major corporations to small businesses send greetings of good cheer and peace to all people.
- It is the season of giving, the season of forgiveness.
- It is the time that families draw back together and warring nations call for a cease-fire.

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- Christmas has something for everyone.

- Again Isaiah 9 can be helpful.
- As the prophecy looks to the future from verse 2 and on - it speaks of the nations increasing in joy, of the people rejoicing, of plentiful harvests, of times of peace and for the end of war.
- A time which everyone can enjoy and value.
- And the reason given for this special time – is that a child is born. Look at verse 6
- *‘For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. He will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace’*
- Great things are predicted, and so it will need a great one to bring that about.
- And this child, this son – will be the one who brings those great things.

- This list of titles should give us pause for thought – not because we sing them in glorious Christmas Carols, but because they tell you something of the one they are talking about.
- The title we each hold tells you something about who we are – a Mr or Mrs, a Doctor, a Professor, a Magistrate, a Premier, or Prime Minister, or perhaps even a Queen.
- And the reverence that is given tells you something about the respect that you command – Sir, Maim, Dad, Mum, Your honour, Your excellency, Your majesty.
- Yet as good as those titles or those acknowledgement might be – can anyone live up to the title of Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace?
- To have just one of those titles would be amazing – but to have all of those titles should prompt us to stand and give attention.
- And can anyone carry the rule of all government on his shoulders for all time, or sit on an everlasting throne with the power to establish and uphold justice and righteousness forever?
- That is a job description that points only one direction – it points to the greatest and the most wonderful.
- And Isaiah says..... that will be a child, a given son.
- And what will that sons name be? – it will be Immanuel, which means ‘God is with us’.

Three meaningful reasons why Christmas is so special:

- It is surprising,

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- It helps us to reflect back and look forward
- It is for everyone

At Christmas, we *reflect back* to that day when God *surprisingly* sent his son so that *everyone* can *look forward* to a wonderful future with God.

Next Reading: Colossians 1:15-23

Then a Carol

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Talk 2

[Wrapped Gift still present at the front]

What about Christmas makes our life better?

- Okay, we have looked at three meaningful reasons why Christmas is so special.
- For a just few more moments now I would like us to consider what it is about Christmas that makes our life better.
- At Christmas we are given a good gift – a great gift. God gave us his son.
- And when we open that gift and take a moment to ponder what we receive at Christmas we should discover a generous collection of gifts.
- In fact there are many, but let me suggest just three.

First, Christmas makes our life better today because we have a **renewed relationship**.

- Our third reading tonight came from the Gospel of Matthew.
- It tells us about how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about.
- And in that passage we read the very familiar nativity story.
- Mary pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, surprisingly she is found to be pregnant.
- Understandably Joseph moves to break off the engagement when a messenger (an angel) from the Lord appears to Joseph in a dream – verse 20 – *‘Joseph, son of David’* which is another way of saying: Joseph, remember you are a son of David, you are a descendant of the tribe of Judah whom I have made promises to in the past (the promises that we looked at in Isaiah)
- *‘Don’t be afraid to take Mary home as your wife because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save people from their sins’*
- We have said before that Christmas is surprising. Spare a thought for how surprised both Mary and Joseph would have been to receive this news!
- Jesus was not given at Christmas solely so that Mary and Joseph, a stable full of animals, and some shepherds could come and worship a baby in a manger.
- Jesus was given to fulfil the promise that God had given his people – see verse 22 *‘all this took place to fulfil what the Lord has said through the prophet: ‘The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel (which means God with us).’*
- God has come to us.

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- The promise that was given through Isaiah all those years ago, now finds its fulfilment in the birth of this little baby.
- Christmas makes our life better because it is at Christmas that God kept his promise to restore his relationship with his people.
- To be *God with us* means that God gives us the possibility to be intimately involved with him.
- God drops his defences – and allows himself to become the most vulnerable (in fact as vulnerable as a baby) so that we know we could approach him without fear.
- At Christmas God become breakable and fragile. He became someone we could hurt.
- Christmas teaches that God is concerned about the physical not just the spiritual – he came with a body – and this body lived, breathed, ate, pooped, slept, experienced poverty, and temperature!
- – and God did it this – because he wanted to give us the opportunity to renew our relationship with him.

Second, Christmas makes our life better today because we see that **God wants to put things right.**

- In the fourth reading we read a segment from a letter to the Church in Colosseae.
- It speaks of the desire God has to see all things put right – and it speaks of the way he plans to do that.
- It is through his Son.
- You can see from verse 15 and following - this son has authority over all things – for all things we created in him – the heavens, the earth, the visible the invisible, all people even the rich and powerful – all was created for him and through him.
- We have already seen the titles and the acknowledgements that would be given to the son.
- What Colossians helps us to see is that with those titles and acknowledgements also comes the power and authority to do what God had promised.
- For this Son was head of all, supreme, and in whom all things would hold together.
- Christmas teaches that God is concerned about our world and wants to ensure that things are put right – and to ensure that it does he has given his son to be its ultimate judge.

But how? How will this child, this son achieve so much?

Finally, Christmas makes our life better because we see **God reconciles us with him by giving us Jesus.**

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[Unwrap the present and then open the present out to reveal a white cross (a square box will open in the shape of a cross)]

- This child needed to grow up.
- Matthew 1:21 *'She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins'*
- How is it that this newborn son going to save people from their sins?
- Well this child needed to die – in their place.
- In Jesus we have one who came to be God with us – to be human with us – and then to die for us.

- Look finally again at that last passage – to the end of the letter to the Colossians.
- From verse 19... *'For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, 20 and **through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.** 21 Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour. 22 But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation'*

- At Christmas we see that God did something remarkable to remove the obstacles that alienated all people from him – so that we can now truly see and know that "God is with us".
- Jesus didn't remain a baby – in his physical body – he grew and faced persecution, was beaten, and stabbed – and ultimately died – so that by the death of his physical body we could be holy in God's sight.

Three meaningful reasons why Christmas is so special?

- It is *surprising*,
- It helps us to *reflect back* (now to the wonderful cross of Jesus) *and look forward* (to the wonderful promise of being forever with God)
- It is for *everyone*

What it is about Christmas that makes our life better?

- It shows us we have a renewed relationship with God.
- It gives a clear indication that God what to put things right – and does.
- And that God reconciles us to him by giving us Jesus.

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PAUSE

Closing Prayer

- I want to finish, by offering you a prayer.
- Printed on the backside of your program is a Puritans' prayer called 'The Gift of Gifts'.
- It is a wonderful prayer to pray not just a Christmas, but anytime – as it expressed the wonder of what God did in sending us Jesus.
- Let me pray that for us now...

The Gift of Gifts

O God, take me in spirit to the watchful shepherds, and enlarge my mind;

let me hear good tidings of great joy, and hearing, believe, rejoice, praise, adore,

my conscience bathed in an ocean of repose, my eyes uplifted to a reconciled Father;

place me with ox, ass, camel, goat, to look with them upon our Redeemer's face, and in him account myself delivered from sin;

let me with Simeon clasp the new-born child to my heart, embrace him with undying faith, exulting that he is mine and I am his.

In him thou hast given me so much that heaven can give no more. AMEN.

('The Gift of Gifts' in The Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers and Devotions. Arthur Bennett (ed.). Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Banner of Truth Trust, 2003 (first published in 1975), 16)