

Carol Concert

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Preacher: Graeme Shanks

- [0 : 0 0] Well, thank you to everyone who's participated this far in our service. Folks, great to see you this evening. I love Christmas.
- There are some pretty scandalous things that go on at Christmas, I think you'll agree. Some pretty scandalous things that I seem to notice every year. Things that you think about and you see and you think, that just shouldn't be allowed to happen.
- Now, I've got your attention with that introduction, haven't I? Let me give you some examples of how this is playing out in our world at the minute. From the world of food, here are some of the Christmas products that are currently on sale in our supermarkets at Christmas time.
- You ready for these? Okay, pop into your local Asda and you can pick up your very own Christmas dinner pizza. Anybody fancy that one? No? Oh, wow, that's a groan.
- Okay, take a trip to Iceland. And you can walk away with some Christmas tree flavoured crisps. Anyone pining for that?
- [1 : 0 3] No? No? Had to do it. Had to do it. Okay, and to get you really into the Christmas mood, and this is still Iceland, why not spice up your Christmas dinner with some Marmite sprouts?
- You can actually buy this stuff. Do you see what I mean by scandalous? Yeah? Or, and here's my favourite. You can take a trip to Sainsbury's, and you can walk away with, and then go home and make, your very own cup of Brussels sprout flavoured tea.
- Is that not incredible? There's some pretty scandalous things that go on at Christmas time. And tonight, just for ten minutes or so, I want us to think about the scandal that's right at the heart of Christmas.
- And it's a scandal that every single one of us here tonight is caught up in. You see, the verses that Maggie read to us just a few moments ago from the Bible, they're written by this man called John.
- And John was just an ordinary fisherman, working in the family business when he first encountered Jesus. That was John. And the thing about Jesus is that when John encountered him, Jesus transformed his life.
- [2 : 1 6] He completely turned it upside down. So much so that we read in the Bible that John left everything behind to follow this man, Jesus.
- And John went on to become one of Jesus' closest disciples. So what that means is that John, he lived with Jesus. John, he talked with Jesus.
- John, he listened to Jesus. And John watched Jesus in action, up close and personal, for the last three years of Jesus' earthly life. And John watched Jesus die.
- And John watched this man, Jesus, come back to life again. And after all of that, what he said, what he did, John has sat down and he's wrote this account of Jesus' life.
- What he did, what he said, so that people down the generations will be able to pick this up in the years to come, read about Jesus for ourselves, and come to have life in his name by believing in him.

[3 : 21] Now essentially that's the story of everyone who has become a Christian ever since. That this man, Jesus Christ, is no joy stealer. That this man, Jesus Christ, is no happiness spoiler.

That this man, Jesus Christ, is the life giver. So John says in these verses tonight, let me tell you about the scandal that's right at the heart of Christmas.

Let me firstly tell you of the scandal of the God at Christmas time who said, here I am. About the God who sent his one and only son into this world.

You see, John uses that word world, you might have noticed it in the reading, he uses that word four times in quick succession, right? World, world, world, world.

Now why does he do that? Is it because he's got a limited vocab? No. Is it because he skipped GCSE English? No. Is it simply that he's living in a time before Thesaurus.com?

[4 : 24] No. He mentions it four times as if to say, guys, get your head around the fact, get your head around the truth, comprehend it, that Jesus really did come here, into this broken world, into our messed up lives.

Jesus stepped down and he stepped in. The one through whom all creation, everything was made, became a creature.

Jesus, he became one of us. He came and he lived, he literally pitched his tent where we live. He stepped down onto our level, he stepped into our mess.

Jesus, the true light, he entered our world and he entered our lives of darkness. Why? To be light.

To be light, that's why he did it. That's what John is saying. The true light which gives light to everyone was coming into the world. So one of the first things that they teach you, isn't it, in science class at school, if you think back to your biology class, that to all living beings, light is life.

[5 : 40] Light is life. And where there is no light, there is death. That's essentially what John is saying there. Light is life. So John says firstly, let me tell you about the scandal of the God who said, here I am.

And secondly, let me tell you about the scandal of the world that says, away you go. Here's the tragedy, says John. The world did not what?

Recognize him. They didn't, do you see what he says? The world didn't receive him. Not as in Jesus, if only you'd been wearing your conference lanyard, if only he hadn't been wearing your CEU Jimmy hat, then we might have had a chance at understanding and seeing who you really are.

That's not what John is saying. John is speaking there about an heart attitude. If you think about it, right, what is the opposite of receiving? It's rejecting, isn't it?

And the thing about this arm folding, fist wagging, brow frowning, teeth grinding attitude towards God, this is what I know to be true in my life, before I became a Christian, is that this runs right to the core of each one of our hearts.

[7 : 04] Do you know we've got a two-year-old girl, do you know what her favorite word of the minute is? Anyone have a guess? No. No. She just loves saying no. Do you want some dinner? No.

Do you want me to help you get dressed? No. Are you just saying no? It's because you like saying no. No. I should really stop doing that, shouldn't I? But when it comes to that inward defiance, that inward desire for independence, I didn't have to send her on an intensive residential course to learn how to do that.

I didn't set her down, get out my whiteboard and say, this is the philosophical meaning of the word no, and this is how one would use it in a sentence. I didn't have to do that. No one taught her to do it.

No one taught her how to say no. No one taught her how to be independent in one of her own way. And do you know why I know that? Because no one taught me to do it. No one taught me how to do that.

That inward desire for independence, that wants my own way, that inward rebellion that says, I don't want to go God's way. And the Bible would have a word for that sense of rebellion, and it's the word sin.

[8 : 09] You think about it, sin, three letters, right? S-I-N. Sorry God, I'm in charge. No to your ways. Sorry God, I'm in charge. No to your ways.

And the thing about the sin that plagues each one of us is that it has separated us from the holy God in whose image we were made to live into relationship with him.

It's separated us from him. We don't deserve to be on the receiving end of God's favor. On the contrary, we deserve to be on the receiving end of God's righteous anger against our sin.

Sorry, at our sin against him. And we're lost. And we're standing down the barrel of a really hopeless and tragic future without God, without Jesus.

And that's bad news. That's really bad news. But friends, we need to swallow the bad news. We need to see it. If we're ever to truly savor and see the sweetness of the good news.

[9 : 22] Think about it. Have you seen that light palace thing on George Street? Have you seen that? What time of day does that come into its own? In nighttime, isn't it?

In nighttime. Why? Well, it's because it's only against the backdrop of the darkness that you truly see the splendor of the light.

And that's exactly what John is saying here. And John moves, you see, from saying, let me tell you about, let me tell you of the scandal of the world who said, away you go. And he goes on to say, let me tell you about the scandal of the Savior who says, believe in me.

Receive him, says John. Do you see that word there? Receive him. It's an embrace him. Take the present. It's the kind of thing we talk about this year all the time, isn't it? Because we love to receive gifts.

Love to receive gifts. But the thing about receiving a gift is that that gift, we've done nothing to deserve it. Otherwise, it would be called what?

[10 : 26] Earning a gift. Earning a gift. What is it we sing about Santa? He's making a list, and he's checking it twice. As somebody commented on Twitter recently, somebody should really tell Santa that he's probably in direct contravention of Article 4 of the EU General Data Protection Regulations.

But what is Santa doing with his list? He's checking it twice to check out what? Who's been naughty and nice. Do you see how you earn it with Santa?

You really do earn it with Santa, but that's not how the God of the Bible works. He is not a cold power broker. He is a loving and a gracious self-giver.

And this good news of grace, grace just means that we get something that we don't deserve. This good news of grace is available for all who would what?

Believe in his name. Believe in his name. Not just believe that he existed. Not just believe that he came. But believe in and trust. Lean the whole weight of your life on who he is and what he did.

[11 : 37] Because this baby who was born in the crib, he would grow up and he would become the man on the cross. And a humble birth would culminate in a humiliating death.

Not a tragic accident, but the fulfillment of the eternal divine plan of the Godhead to rescue people, save them, those people who are living in darkness.

To reach out, extend forgiveness, whereas before there was condemnation. To give life, whereas before there was death. To give hope, whereas before there was despair.

And so John says, come and receive, come and save her, come and believe in the child in the manger who would grow up to be the man on the cross. And John says, do you see the lengths that God went to?

Do you see the lengths that God went to for us? I mean, if you think about it, he really didn't need to do that, did he? Really didn't need to do that. He could have quite justifiably passed over all of us.

[12 : 41] But he came. And he acted. Why? Well, because he loves us. Why? Well, because he loves us. But why?

Because he loves us. He loves us. Because he loves us. Because he loves us. And do you see how God didn't just talk a good game? Do you see how he didn't just put on a band-aid charity concert for us?

He didn't just talk a good game. He showed a good game. He showed a good game. And John says to all of us tonight, come and receive him. Come and bow the knee.

Come and receive this gift of life that is on offer through Jesus Christ. Come and give your life to him. Let me tell you about the scandal of the Savior who says, believe in me.

And lastly, let me tell you about the scandal of the Father who says, come on home. Come on home. Because to all who did receive him, what did he do?

[13 : 41] Get your head around this. What did this God do? He gave the right. Feel the power of that word. He gave the right. As in, he's given you the full access to the family privileges to become what?

Children of God. Whereas before, we were spiritual orphans. This invitation is to receive Jesus Christ and become God's spiritual child.

To be adopted into his family. To do the thing that we were designed to do in the first place. Live in joyous, harmonious relationship with the God who made us.

Come and know him, says John. Come and know him. And not only is knowing him the greatest privilege that you and I could ever have. Friends, it's the very reason that you and I were made in the first place.

You know, I always love watching the Narnia films as they come on the telly at Christmas time. I don't know if you enjoy watching them. They're always on, aren't they? BBC One or ITV, something like that. Other channels are available, I'm sure. But I always love watching the Narnia films because personally, I found C.S. Lewis to be one of the most brilliant thinkers and writers of modern times.

[14 : 54] And his Christian faith, C.S. Lewis, the way that C.S. Lewis viewed the world and he saw the world, the life that he had found in Jesus Christ, it always comes through in his writings, doesn't it?

Always comes through in his writings. And I don't know if you've seen the last battle, but there's this scene at the end of the last battle where Jewel, the unicorn, is standing there, stands ready to step into Aslan's country.

And he comes out with this beautiful little saying. He says this, I've come home at last. This is what he says, I've come home at last. This is my real country. This is where I belong.

This is the land that I've been looking for all my life, though I did not know it until now. And what C.S. Lewis is saying through his character, unicorn, is the same thing that John is saying in his gospel.

And it's the same thing that we'll hear somebody up here in just a minute tell us about their life is true in their life in just a few moments. that to know God through faith in Jesus Christ is to come home.

[16 : 01] That's the scandal that's the heart of Christmas. The scandal of the God who said, here I am. The scandal of a world that says, away you go.

The scandal of the Savior who says, believe in me. and the scandal of the Father who says, come on home. And we started our service.

The second song was O Little Town of Bethlehem, one of my favorite carols. And it's got this chorus in it. I'm sure you picked it up as we sang it together earlier.

And let me just read to you these lines that capture the essence of what we've been thinking about tonight. and maybe just mull on them in your head.

How silently, how silently the wondrous gift is given. So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of his heaven.

[17 : 03] No ear may hear his coming, but in this world of sin, where meek souls will receive him still, the dear Christ enters in.

That's the invitation tonight. To come to this God and through faith and trust in his Son Jesus Christ and everything that he's done for us, have life in his name.

What a God. What a God. Folks, I love Christmas time. Do you know why I love Christmas time? Not because of the turkey, not because of the Brussels sprouts, not because of the Queen's Speech and Telly. Do you know why I love Christmas?

Because of this. This is awesome. Life in his name. Come, if you want to tonight, come and let's chat it out what this means tonight. Because there's been some big scandals at the heart of Christmas, isn't there?

Let's come and chat this out tonight. May tonight be the night where you put your faith and your trust in the Saviour, Jesus Christ. So I'm going to pray and just before I pray and then we're going to move on in our service.

[18 : 07] Let's just be still for just a few moments and let's just contemplate everything that we've been thinking about tonight. Dear God, what an amazing God you are.

that despite of who we are, you sent Jesus to seek us and to save us and to bring us back to you.

Dearest Heavenly Father, we ask that in all the fun of Christmas time and all the great things that we get to do and share in, that you would help us to delight most of all in the glorious truth of the child Jesus Christ who you sent in the manger.

Father, thank you that you hear us because we pray in his worthy and precious name. Amen.