

Christ the Redeemer

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Preacher: Graeme Shanks

[0 : 00] Okay, here's what we're going to do for the next 15 or 20 minutes or so. We're going to think about those verses in Colossians 1 that we read in the prayer a little bit earlier. If you want to do that, you can open your Bibles at Colossians chapter 1.

Just three verses we're going to look at, verses 20 to 23. They'll go on the screen at some point as well, so it's always good to have the Bible open in front of us. So last week, I heard one of the best sounds ever.

Do you want to hear about it? So I was taking the kids to school. Not this Thursday, but last Thursday. And it's a sleety day. It's a cold day.

You know, kind of Scotland just doing its Scotland in winter thing. And all of a sudden, there's a noise erupts in the playground, this quiet scene. One boy shouts, snow!

And what was a quiet scene? And all of a sudden, now every single person who's in this playground lifts their eyes and has a look. And the guys, the boy is right.

[1 : 06] So everybody starts noticing that it's snowing. And one after one, as each child recognizes it, joy and laughter erupts across the playground.

Now, is that noise not one of the best things that we can ever hope to hear? Right? When children discover white snow for the first time in the year.

And so what happens is we hear this noise. I hear this noise. I lift my eyes. And because of where we live over this side of town, we can see the Pentland Hills. And the Pentland Hills are covered in pure white.

There it is. It's untouched, pure, unstained, perfect snow. And I hear the dulcet tones of Michael Bubly in my head. A beautiful sight.

We're happy tonight. We're walking in a winter wonderland. You know that scene? You know the scene I'm talking about? The one we get in Christmas cards this time of year? Snow. Perfect snow.

[2 : 04] Tranquility. Peace. White. And here's why I think my heart yearns for that scene every single year when it comes around. I wonder if you're like me.

I yearn for it because I want my life to be like that. Yeah? Inside, is there not our human hearts? Is there not a yearning that that would be true of our lives?

Right? I look back on the 351 days that I've come and gone so far in 2022 in my own life. Oh, and there's been some great times. There's been some joy. There's been tons of laughter.

But also I'm so conscious getting to this time of year. And this year for me has been tinged with regrets. It's been tinged with hurt. It's been tinged with words that I said that I can't take back.

It's been tinged with missed opportunities. And so every person that comes to me this time of year and says, what are you doing this Christmas? The temptation for us, is it not, to spin the story and to keep up the show that we're somehow, all of us, taking up our own little scene in this perfect Christmas postcard.

[3 : 11] Right? The pressure we put on ourselves and our world to kindle the magic of Christmas for one or two days a year, when actually we feel like in that words of that carol, we are in our lives in the bleak midwinter.

And that's a crushing pressure, is it not, that comes at this time of year, that maybe comes at no other, where we feel the pressure that our lives should be Christmas postcard white, but we're conscious that they're not.

Friends, if you are here today and you're weary and sad, if you're here today and you're feeling the anxiety, if you're here today and you're aware of someone who you love, who will not be around that Christmas table this year, then I've got wonderful news for you today in this passage.

Because this is the gospel, what Christians call the gospel. And here it is taking place in Bethlehem. And this is good news for weary and sad and worn out people.

And here's what I mean by that. I'm going to give you two reasons, one later on, as to why I became a Christian at age 18. Do you know what the first one was? The first one was that I found in the Bible a compelling realism that I found nowhere else in my life.

[4 : 30] I agreed and C.S. Lewis put it like this. He said, when he became a Christian, I've been reading poems. I've been reading poems, romances, vision, literature, legends and myths my whole life.

I know what they are like. And I know none of them are like the Bible. I remember when I first became a Christian, it was like I picked up this book and it was like for the first time in my life, I was looking at a map that helped me understand the contours of my worlds.

Now, there were three phrases in that passage that we read earlier that describe the human condition. And ones that I remember when I read them, I thought, yep, that is true. Here's the first one. Did you pick them up? The first one is that word alienated.

Right? By our own free will. This is what we are. We are estranged. We are separated from the good God of love, of life and light who created us. And he created us in his image, not by chance, not by accident.

He created us in his image to live in relationship with him, enjoying him and knowing him forever. But now our paths, because of our rebellion, are set on a destiny of physical and eternal death.

[5 : 43] And because of that, what are we in our thoughts? We are hostile in mind. We are enemies in our minds. Because we don't want the God who made us.

We don't want his ways. We find them restrictive. We find them offensive. And because of that, what are we? Well, we are doing evil deeds. Do you see?

The kind of global acts that cause wars, the kind of everyday acts that cause division and hurt. I don't know about you, but I'm always amazed at my ability to hurt the people that I love the most. And those three words, those three phrases come together. And they come together in that word sin. You know, we live its effects daily. And we feel its effects daily as it wreaks havoc on our world. I find it interesting. I wonder if you saw that that's the tone that John Lewis are being praised for recognizing in their Christmas advert this year. You've seen that one? The John Lewis advert?

[6 : 46] Choosing not to go for novelty, not to go for cuddly monsters, not to go for the man on the moon looking through the telescope, but instead going for reality, right? Basing their advert around the fact that heartbreakingly, some 108,000 children are currently caught up in the care system in the UK.

It's almost as if we're waking up, isn't it, to the fact that, no, something is not right. This should not be how it is. And yet this is our world. And the Bible would say it is because of our hearts.

And so what do we do with that? Well, there's three options, right? Or three animals when you think about it. Okay, what do we do with that?

Well, we can go full hamster, right? And we can try and get on the proverbial training wheel and we can try and run a bit harder, trying to do a bit more, aiming to do a little bit better.

We can go full hamster or we can go full ostrich, right? We can put our heads in the sand. We can close our ears. We can say it ain't so. We can try and escape the realities of our world that we feel so acutely at this time of year.

[7 : 57] I find it interesting that the BBC now show their biggest and their best shows, not on a Saturday night at eight o'clock, as used to be the case in my day growing up.

When do they show their best shows now? They show them at Sunday night at what time? At nine o'clock, every single time, right?

And it's almost as if we thank them as a nation for the fact that for one extra hour on a Sunday night, we thank them for being able to forget about one Monday morning for one extra hour, right?

It's what we do. It's escapism. Or we can go, and this is the invitation of this passage today, we can go full lamb, right?

Full hamster, full ostrich. This invitation is to go full lamb. As we see Mary's little lamb born in that manger in Bethlehem. Now, if you've got the passage open in front of you, don't worry if you don't, it will go on the screen.

[8 : 57] You'll see that Paul makes a big deal of the fact that Jesus has a body of flesh, right? That he really came as a human being.

That for Paul, as he writes this, this is not some take it or leave it little detail of the Christian faith. In fact, this is a cornerstone of the Christian faith, right?

This is like the Jenga brick, that if you pulled this out, the whole thing would collapse around you and you lose, right? Jesus was no ghost figure. No, without ceasing to be God, he really did become a human being.

The eternal God was at one point in time smaller than a full stop. The creator of all things came out the womb, all fingers and toes.

The God who upholds all things had to have his umbilical cord cut. I remember moving to Bristol and asking a lady who lived, who worked in the PR department of the company that I was going to work for that I'd seen a flat in a certain area of the city.

[10:09] And I asked her, I said, is this a nice area? Should I live there? Should I, what kind of word would you use to describe it? Do you know the word she used? She used the word earthy. Yeah, I know I'd never heard of it before.

Earthy. What she meant is that area of town, there's no glitz and glam, no pomp, real people, rough and ready, you'll be right in the thick of it.

Earthy. Use that word all the time now, I love it. Earthy. The wonder of Christmas is that in Jesus, God got earthy. Right?

Born into our sweat, our toil, our mess. The son of God shed tears. He knew smiles. He got splinters.

He felt hunger. He had needs. Why? Well, last week we thought about the fact that Jesus coming, he came to reconcile all things.

[11:09] And this week, it's almost in this passage that Paul goes from all things, he goes personal. He says, you. Jesus came for you. Right?

What did he do? Jesus took responsibility. That's what he did. Right? We hate people in our culture who don't take responsibility. It's why Matt Hancock went on, I'm a celebrity, get me out of here, wasn't it?

Trying to gain back his reputation that he lost. Why? Because we didn't trust his words and didn't trust him to take responsibility. Well, this Jesus took responsibility with his life.

Right? He came, he entered our world, he stood in our shoes and he lived a life that we couldn't. A life lived, a perfect life of worship to his father.

And you have to say, what a life it was. And this is the second reason I remember becoming a Christian when I was 18. Reading the person, reading about the person of Jesus and thinking to myself, I've never met anyone like that.

[12:14] You have to say that you should look at Jesus in the Bible and if you haven't done that this morning, the invitation is for you to do it and you can grab a Bible before you go. We'd love to make that happen. You have to say, here is the fullest human being who ever lived.

He did what we couldn't. Healing the sick, going towards the destitute, eating and drinking with questionable people. You have to look at Jesus and say, here is the most fully satisfied human being that's ever existed.

His life. He lives the life that we couldn't live and his death. His life ends crucified on this Roman cross. The death that he suffered in his body that we deserved.

This Jesus took it. He took it. He lived the life that we couldn't live and he died the death that we should have died and he did it.

Why? To take responsibility to win his people. That's what his name means. His name means God saves. He came to save us from our sin. And the call is to trust in this rescue plan hatched in eternity past by this God of love.

[13:29] The promise that he made that snowballed and grew through the Old Testament until Jesus came. He lived, he died, he rose and he calls us now in the position where he is of all power and authority having conquered death to trust him.

Come and trust him. That his death is our death. That his life is our life. And his father is our father. You know, I always think about this what it means to be a Christian. I remember a number of years ago Alex and I and the kids we started climbing Blackford Hill. New Year's Day I think or the 2nd of January. We started climbing Blackford Hill and we get halfway up and then we realise with the kids that this ain't gonna work.

And we're with friends and our friends want to get to the top. They've never really been to the top so they keep on walking to the top and we say we'll just stay halfway and we'll just get you on the flip side when you come back down. And so we sat there on the benches getting colder but we've got our big winter jackets on and we each took a child at a point there was only two child in and we just wrapped them in our jackets.

What is it to be a Christian? What is it to trust Jesus? At its heart the Bible talks about the fact that our lives are in him. He has taken full responsibility for the life that we couldn't live and the death we should have died.

[14 : 54] And that is what happens to our lives. And that is what it is to go full lamb. To trust in him and to come to him and to find our life in his light.

And what's the result of that? Well we are reconciled. Those now what three phrases describe us as Jesus presents us before God the Father.

Holy you see that? Set apart. Blameless without blemish not just forgiven but perfect and above reproach.

Meaning that no charge or accusation will stick against those who trust in Jesus because he has paid it all. And now in him what are our lives because when God looks at us he sees Jesus.

What are our lives? Our lives are pure as snow. That is what your life is in the eyes of your loving father because of Jesus. And the invitation then is to come and trust him.

[15 : 58] And maybe you have maybe your life is in Jesus. The invitation again is to come and find rest in him. To fall back to collapse yourself in who he is and what he's done for us on the cross and to bask ourselves in our father's love for us.

That's what sent Jesus. Our father's love for us. You know what does this look like just as we close? I want to tell you about my friend Gordon. Right Gordon's another pastor in the city but that's not how I really know Gordon.

I know Gordon because I see him as a fellow dad every day on the school run. Right? And every day I see him and he texts me sometimes afterwards. He's become a really good friend. He texts me and he said, buddy, you're looking really down today.

Are you okay? Sometimes I text him, mate, you're looking quite sad today. Anything I can help with? And I love it because we so often chatted about the struggles in our lives. Right?

Life is really hard. Battling illness as a family, raising children aware of your own weakness, concerns for your own family, things that always need done around the house, financial concerns, all of these things which would seek to rob us of that joy of who we are.

[17 : 14] And I said to him, buddy, listen, how do you do it? What is God teaching you? And he said, because of the gospel, there's so much going on in my life, but I say to myself that there's two things that are true for me every day, two phrases are true for me every day because my life is caught up in Jesus.

Do you know what he said? He said the first one is that there's no one today I need to impress. And he said, secondly, there's nothing today I need to prove. And that's what it is to trust in Jesus.

The one who came for us, the one whose name means God saves, the one who lives the life we couldn't live, who dies the death we should have died, and who now holds our lives in his right hand at the God the Father's right hand side in the place of all power and authority.

This is not about us up in our game. This is not us about finding our greatest self at this time of year. This is another wonderful reminder that Jesus has done it all.

So that's what it is to go full, Lamb. That's the invitation we have this morning. So come to Bethlehem and savour what God is doing. As your Saviour takes on flesh and is born.

[18 : 22] No wonder the angel said, it is good news of great joy for all people. Let's pray, will we? And we thank you, dear God, for your wonderful love for us.

So undeserving. Lord, we weren't looking for you. Thank you that this tells us, the baby in the manger, that into our darkness and our distress and our sin, that you came looking for us.

And we just thank you that this is the kind of God that you are. And so, Father, I pray for those here today who are hurting. Lord, I pray that by your Spirit you would meet them and comfort them in their loss.

Lord, those who are anxious, those who are worried, those who are stressed, those who are fearful of what tomorrow might hold. Father, thank you that because Jesus came to earth, took on our flesh, not only does he know what it is, but Father, thank you that he's able to bring rest and peace

for our souls.

And we just thank you for this wonderful time of year, everything that we've done so far today. And we commit ourselves to you in his wonderful name. Amen.