

The Lengths & the Love

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[0 : 00] Well, good evening, everyone. Evening. Excellent. It's great to see that you're here because I can't actually see you because of the lights. Excellent. Thank you so much to everyone who's contributed so far to our service.

It is just so great to get together and to sing God's praise. Here we are. We are officially seven days away from Christmas Day. Just think about what you'll be doing this time next week.

We're all gearing up for it, aren't we? As you look around the city, as you look at what your friends are doing, as you look about what's going on, we're gearing up for Christmas Day. The mince pies are out.

I've already been having a couple of them this weekend. Love mince pies. The Christmas jumpers are well and truly on. They seem to be getting crazier every year. Christmas parties are in full swing.

And I got really excited today because I turned on Netflix and what was recommended for me, Home Alone. That's when you know it's Christmas, isn't it? Home Alone is on the TV. We go bananas for Christmas, don't we, as a city, as a culture, as a people.

[1 : 02] We go bananas for it. We go crazy for it. As well as the silly traditions, I'm sure many of us are looking forward to spending time with those friends and family that we love dearly.

We love spending time with friends and family. And on that note, a friend of mine was telling me a story recently about a man. And a man who was head over heels in love with a woman.

There was a big problem in their relationship, though. He lived in the UK and she lived in Australia. So my friend's telling me this story and I'm thinking what you're thinking as I'm hearing it.

I'm thinking, how committed is this man to this relationship? Well, my friend continued to tell me that this man, he worked really hard at his job. Worked really hard at his job.

And he saved up for months and months on end until eventually he secured enough money to buy a return ticket from London to Sydney to see his beloved.

[2 : 04] Now that's quite impressive, isn't it? I think that's cute. But I guess even more impressive than that. He went all that way and he spent all that money simply to spend 12 hours with the woman that he loved.

Before he had to be back at the airport for his return flight to the UK. Now that is super cute, is it not? I mean, that is something that should be in a Christmas romantic comedy. I feel like I'm describing love actually.

But here's my question for you this evening. As we think about that couple. Picture the scene. She's there. She's waiting for her airport hug at Sydney International Airport.

She's pictured it in her mind. She's thought about the guy. And there's the moment. He steps off the plane. Picture it. He steps off the plane.

He's got flowers in his hand. And he embraces the one that he loves. Here's my question for you this evening as we picture that scene. How would you respond if you were the woman?

[3 : 09] How would you respond? You see, that's what the Bible tells us is the incredible story that happened at Christmas time.

It's that God went to great lengths. And God, out of his great love, stooped down into the darkness. That's what the Bible tells us is the wonder of the baby in the manger.

Now, I wonder if you've ever thought about it like that before. That God went to such lengths. Such lengths that make that man's efforts look like child's play.

God went to such lengths to make himself known to us. And why? Why would he do that? Well, he went to such lengths because of his such love for us.

You know, let me reread verse 14 from the Gospel of John, if you can see it on the screen there. The wonderful words that Esther read to us just a few moments ago. John, the man who saw Jesus up close and personal, he writes this in his Gospel.

[4 : 19] The words became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

So John says, firstly, he says, see the lengths that God went to. John, in the opening verses of his Gospel account, he tells his readers about this word.

And this word was in the beginning. And this word was God. And this word was with God.

In fact, it was through this word that the world, the universe, the cosmos was created. And this word was light.

And in this word was life. Now, who is this word? Who is this word? Well, the word, says John, is Jesus.

[5 : 32] Jesus. The eternal Son of God. The one who has just always been in relationship with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit.

The all-powerful one. The all-seeing one. The all-knowing one. The creator, the sustainer, and the upholder of all things.

And what are we told? He, that is the word, became flesh. Now, one of my TV, my favorite TV shows from a few years ago, I used to watch at Channel 4, Secret Millionaire.

I used to love this show. If you've never watched it before, the idea is that Channel 4, they would convince a millionaire to ditch their luxurious lifestyle for a few weeks.

And to go undercover into a poor community. And the millionaire would live in that community. And they would dress like the people in that community.

[6 : 38] And they would try and live on the budget of the people in that community. And they would get to know the people of that community. And they would get involved with some of the community projects of that community.

And all the while, the people in that community were completely unaware as to who this millionaire really was. And as the show went on, the end of the show was, at the end of the few weeks, the true identity of the millionaire was revealed.

He would write a big fat check, or she would write a big fat check, and the show would finish. There was tears. There was utter astonishment among those in the community when they understood who this person really was.

Well, the Bible tells us that Jesus Christ is the secret millionaire par excellence. God truly has, in the coming of Jesus Christ, he really has, truly has moved into our neighborhoods.

But you see, unlike that program, Jesus didn't come down to go undercover. Jesus came to reveal God to us.

[7 : 46] Here at Christmas is God going to such lengths, such lengths to make himself known to us.

Here is Jesus Christ. Come to be God with us. Come to be Emmanuel. Here is God in human form. Incredible.

Incredible. And has he come to be a king in a royal palace? That would be a stoop down enough for him. No, here is God born in hay and in straw, in a cold and dark, surrounded by stench and surrounded by rags.

But the wonder is that this word would go to even greater lengths. For this baby in the manger, Jesus would grow up and become a man.

And how would he be treated? Would he be celebrated? And would he be worshipped by all? No, he would be rejected and scorned and despised.

[8 : 57] And would he be crowned king of the world as he should have been? No, he was crowned a criminal. And he was crowned with thorns.

And he would be killed on a cross. As creator become creature, takes the punishment for our sins on himself. The very people that he came into the world to save.

Here is the wonder of the baby in the manger. That the one who is higher than we can possibly imagine, stooped lower than we can even begin to comprehend.

God steps into our world. Now, why did God go to such lengths? Why did he go to such lengths? Well, look how John describes this word at verse 14. He is full of grace and truth. Firstly, see the lengths that God went to, says John.

[10:04] But secondly, see the love that God showed. Did the words, did Jesus come down just to show face? Was he kind of like this divine Bob Geldof character that came down and put on a charity gig before he went back to his heavenly dwelling once again?

Did he come just to boost morale? Did he come just to raise funds? Did he come just to drum up support? No, he stooped. He stooped into our darkness in order that he might deal with our darkness.

There's a problem. It's our rebellion against God problem. It's our separation from God problem. It's our sin problem. And God could quite justifiably have left us in our darkness. But he came down in the person of his son, Jesus Christ, full of grace and truth, full of love and compassion to shine light into our darkness.

And to make a way for all who, as we were singing in that last song, all who would come and receive him, be made reconciled with your creator.

[11:27] Now truly that is an undeserved gift from heaven. And the Bible, the word for that is grace. It's an undeserved gift.

And how does John describe Jesus Christ? Full of grace and truth. You see, the baby in the manger is actually a divine invitation into the greatest privilege possible of entering into a relationship.

A relationship of joy. A relationship of forgiveness. A relationship of wholeness. And a relationship knowing fully the God who created you.

So as we close, let me take you back to the Australian airport. Picture that hug.

Picture that hug. Must have been great. Picture that hug. Let me ask you again, how would you respond if you were that woman? This evening, this Christmas time, as we spend time doing all sorts of things, but as we spend time looking at the baby in the manger, let's consider the lengths that God went to.

[12:47] And let's consider the love that God showed. And so the question for us this evening is, how will we respond? You know, we sang just the last song there, one of my favorite Christmas carols, Oh Holy Night.

And it's a modern version of that song that we sung. And let me just read to you the lines and the words from that last chorus that are on the screen for you to think about as well.

And let's finish with this thought. Oh Holy Night, the last verse goes like this. Come then to him who lies within the manger.

With joyful shepherds, proclaim him as Lord. Let not the promised son remain a stranger. In reverent worship, make Christ your adored.

Eternal life is theirs who would receive him. With grace and peace, their lives he will adorn. Fall on your knees.

[13:56] Receive the gift of heaven. Oh night divine. Oh night when Christ was born. Oh night, oh holy night, when Christ was born.

In just a minute I'm going to pray and we'll stand and sing our final carol. But just before we do that, it's such a busy time of year, isn't it? That we're running around doing all sorts of different things. What a great chance on the cusp of a really busy week just to have some stillness and to have some silence. And maybe just to think about what we've been singing about and reading tonight. So let's just have a moment, a few moments of silence and let's use this opportunity to think about these things. Almighty God and loving Heavenly Father, we praise you for the truth of Christmas. and we pray, Lord God, that you would help us not to miss in all the busyness and all the excitement and in all that goes on, not to miss the staggering truth that you sent your Son, Jesus Christ, the light into our darkness to save us from our darkness.

[15:18] darkness. Would you help us to receive him as Lord, Saviour, and would we fall at his feet and declare him King and Lord.

And in Jesus' name, we pray these things. Amen.