

The Day of Birth vs The Day of Death

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[0 : 00] Happy Christmas, almost. 26th of July, 2016, about 10.30 in the morning, I was handed this little red alien-looking thing that we now call our son, Ruben.

Where's Pete, who was interviewed? Have you got kids? You use the word pure when it comes to the birth of a baby. Not me. It's the wrong word. That is not the word that comes to mind when I think back to that moment.

And I prepared myself for being handed this little baby boy. And I prepared myself for the emotions that I expected to feel. So I expected to be absolutely overwhelmed by love.

And I expected myself to kind of be undone by thankfulness. And I expected myself to feel this kind of burden-shedding sense of relief.

And I did feel all of those things. But the overriding emotion, the most intense thing that I felt that day, I had not prepared myself for.

[1 : 09] And the emotion was vulnerability. As I held this little baby boy, seconds old, I felt massively, massively vulnerable.

And it made no sense to me. Out of the three people significantly involved, so maybe me less significantly, but me, Sarah, my wife, and this little boy, I was by far the least vulnerable.

So Sarah was still on the operating table, the surgeon's still doing their thing, the surgical nurse who's been unbelievably good, emergency procedure, so quite scary. She was massively vulnerable at that moment.

This little boy, seconds old, could do nothing for himself, being held by an amateur, was massively, massively vulnerable. And yet here's me feeling exactly the same thing.

And it made no sense to me. I felt stupid feeling vulnerable. But as I held him, and I saw how much he needed me, I started to doubt whether or not I could be that for him.

[2 : 22] And as I saw this thing, I'm not calling that, my wife tells me off. As I saw this boy, and how dependent he was going to be on us, I questioned whether or not we could be dependable for him.

Has anyone else been there? Has had kids? I felt weak, exposed, wondered whether or not I could be trusted. I wasn't quite asking for the gift receipt, but I was scared in that moment.

Now the only feeling that I could compare to it, that I had that was kind of making sense of it, was actually a very different moment. And as a teenager, my granny passed away with cancer.

I was very tight with my granny, loved her a bit. And when she had battled for a long time with cancer of her esophagus, she passed away at home as she wanted. And we got the phone call, and so me and my dad went round, seeing my granddad.

But you know, the event or the question that sticks in my mind from that day was when my dad turned to me and goes, do you want to see your granny one last time?

[3 : 29] I was in the living room. She was still there in the bedroom. And quick as a flash, I said, no. And the reason I said no was because I could not cope with the vulnerability that it made me feel.

Now, they are two massively different events at the total opposite spectrum of human experience and human existence. The birth of a little boy, the death of my granny, and yet the emotion in the mix of those two things was exactly the same.

Massively, massively vulnerable. In those moments, if you had asked me which one is better, the answer to that question is almost kind of offensively obvious.

Which is better, the day of birth or the day of death? It's obvious. I would trade anything to go through the birth of a boy again in comparison to the death of my granny.

The day of birth is better than the day of death. Now, if you come to this church, you've been around, you've been looking at a book of the Bible called Ecclesiastes. If you've never been to church before, if you've never read a book of the Bible before, I dare you, read Ecclesiastes.

[4 : 48] It will do your nothing. It's one of the books in the Bible that is fascinating and yet frustrating. And one of the places where it most bugs my happiness is this verse.

Let me read it to you. This is Ecclesiastes chapter 7, verse 1. The day of death is better than the day of birth.

Happy Christmas. Nice cheery note to land on tonight. Come to church, they said. It will be great, they said. Right, I said. The day of death better than the day of birth.

Now, I read something like that in the Bible and I want to argue with it. I want to say, no danger, I'm not having that. So what's he saying? I think his point is this.

The day of birth holds only the potential of what you might do. Whereas the day of your death shows the proof of what you have done.

[5 : 54] Which is it that gives a better estimation of your life? The day of your birth or the day of your death? See, in the day of your birth, lots of people probably looked at you and said, all those nonsense, all those things that make no sense, but we all do.

And we dream dreams and we have visions of what this child is going to do. Whereas the day of death gives us a complete, final account account of what we have done.

The day of our death will give a complete, final account to God of what we have done. And in that sense, the day of our death is better than the day of birth.

Now, you let that land and you go, that makes me feel massively, massively vulnerable.

Because it gives weight to everything you say, everything you think, everything you do. Doesn't it? It means that everything I did yesterday matters.

[7 : 13] It means everything I've done today matters. It means everything I'll do tomorrow matters. It means that what is said at my funeral will depend on how I've spent what I'm given.

It means that when God looks at me at the end of my life, what I've done will determine my eternity. See, when we contemplate this verse, the day of death, better than the day of our birth, it should land on us as, I am vulnerable given what I've done.

And in fact, I think that's part of the purpose of the Christmas story. I think it's part of what we've read tonight from the Bible. It is meant to make me and make you feel vulnerable.

The fact that Jesus would have to come from heaven and become a vulnerable baby for us shows our vulnerability. The fact that Jesus would be given names like Emmanuel, God with us, and then Jesus, Savior of sinners, shows that he is going to do something for us that we cannot do for ourselves.

We're vulnerable. We need saving. And we may not like that because we may think, I want to be my own savior. But deep down we know actually we often need saved from ourselves.

[8 : 50] But the day of Jesus' birth does give us this promise of Emmanuel, God with us, Jesus, Savior of sinners. But I think as you look at the life of Jesus, that verse applies.

The day of his death is better than the day of his birth. Easter is better than Christmas. Why?

Because in his birth, all we are given are promises of what he is going to do. Whereas by the time of his death, we are given the proof of everything that he has done.

And so you see Jesus, Easter Friday, strung up on a tree. Why? He is suffering hell to save me from hell. He is taking on the vulnerability of death and the punishment of hell to save me from that.

Meaning that without him, I am vulnerable to that prospect after my death. And yet on the cross, Jesus takes what I deserve to give me what I don't deserve.

[10 : 07] He takes hell to give me heaven. He takes sin to give me his perfection. Which is why the day of Jesus' death, in some ways, is better than the day of his birth.

Because it gives you the final promise that although at Christmas we're told he's going to come and save, by Easter you say he has saved sinners. Unlike us, Jesus doesn't just have a day of birth though and a day of death.

he has a day of birth Christmas, he has a day of death Easter, but he has a third day. He has a resurrection day.

He has a day that proves everything that he has said he will do. Because he said he will die and he did and he said he will rise and he did. Meaning that for a Christian they can actually say that their day of death will be better than their day of birth.

Why? Because the day of my birth brought me into this world full of suffering and shame and sin.

But if I trust in Jesus my death is going to take me out of a world of suffering and shame and sin and into a world where there is nothing but light and life.

[11 : 26] Now you'll sit on Christmas Day at some point presents opened, turkeys grand, board games played and you'll probably sit quite content. A little oasis from real life.

You don't have to work. Telly's on so the kids are entertained or you're snoring away. Life's okay. A little oasis. But in many ways that's all it is, isn't it?

Most of our life is spent chasing that oasis that will distract ourselves from the fact that our life is between these two bookends. a day of birth and a day of death.

I was struck by this last Sunday. Our church doesn't have a building. We meet in a place called Libertus up in Graves Mount. It's a daycare centre for those at the end of their life, particularly those struggling with dementia and Alzheimer's.

Now my grandparents on my mother's side both passed away with early onset dementia and Alzheimer's. My mum worked for Alzheimer's Scotland for years. I know what it's like. We sat there last Sunday morning in what they call their art room.

[12 : 33] And this is where people can come and enjoy being with other people away from the loneliness of home, giving some of their family respite and they're entertained in the art room. And I'm stood there looking around the room seeing all these kind of craft things that they did.

And do you know what it reminded me of? All the stuff that my three year old son brings home from nursery that the recycling bin loves.

But isn't it interesting that the same way that we are looked after when we are young becomes the same way that we are looked after when we're old. Life is short.

We begin in nappies and we often end in nappies. It's a cycle. Often humiliating. always vulnerable. But where we're confronted by life's vulnerability, the message of Christmas confronts us with that that shows us although we are vulnerable in the face of an eternity from a God that we have rebelled against, in Jesus he is promising a stability.

[13 : 46] As Pete talked about, a peace, a joy that you can find not just as an oasis to escape the struggles of life but as a reality to help you face the struggles of life.

Not just a birthday and a death day but a third day. The promise of hope beyond the grave. Now if you don't know that hope, if you don't know any of this stuff, speak to someone who invited you or someone who looks like they know what they're talking about, who sung the carols well, and pester them, go home and read Ecclesiastes and wrestle with it, argue with it.

Maybe this Christmas will be the day that you can find hope even in the face of this day of death.

I'm going to pray and then I have no idea what's happening next.

Let me pray. Our Father in heaven, we live our lives pursuing escapes from reality.

Longing to find something that will numb us from what we fear the most. Father, I pray that whether it's just a hungry soul or a troubled soul or a tired soul or a hopeless soul in here tonight, that they might see in the real message at the heart of Christmas the good news of Jesus as mighty God, everlasting Father, Prince of peace.

[15 : 40] And I pray these things in his name. Amen. Amen. Amen.