

Good News

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Preacher: Derek Lamont

[0 : 0 0] Okay, just for a few moments, I think for so many, carol services may have different meanings. For some people, they're probably clichéd. Now, if you looked up Oxford English Dictionary, you would find the meaning of clichéd as a hackneyed theme characterization or situation. Maybe that's what you feel about carol services. I hope not, since you're here anyway. Others might find it sentimental. And that is defined as something that's marked or governed by feelings, sensibility, or emotional idealism, or it may be, that the more cynical among us may regard it as spreading fake news, which is defined as false or misleading stories that are presented as true. And again, I hope that's not the case for any of you. For many people, it may be just a little distraction that a pretty cold and wet and miserable time of year. It goes along with the kind of mild wine which you can smell coming up through the hall and the turkey, which you're not getting this evening, but there will be munch pies.

And it's that kind of once a year thing that never surfaces beyond December the 26th. It may be just for us a nod to the divine, but largely irrelevant in our day to day living.

Certainly the message being largely irrelevant. And if that may be the case with some of you here this evening, what I want to do first of all is make an apology. I want to say sorry as representing myself and other followers of Jesus who are here, a part of this church, whom we have invited you this evening to the service. If any of us have given the impression by our lives that he is largely irrelevant, Jesus, then we say sorry for that. And sometimes as Christians, we have to ourselves be challenged by that, that sometimes we live as practical atheists and we forget the significance of Jesus. But I think for us generally, it's not the case that he's irrelevant, but sometimes we are a little bit scared of how people might react to our life of faith and to our trust in Jesus as our Savior. And we also battle with our own insecurities and doubts sometimes. So the challenge for us all this evening is from the passage we read and the words of the angel that came to Mary, don't be afraid.

I bring you good news of great joy for all the people. And that is a powerful message that comes at this time of year. It's that angelic message that breaks into real history, long time ago certainly, but real history. And it's the description of the coming of Jesus Christ into the world, which we've been singing about and which is the theme of our worship at this time of year. Good news of great joy is what describes the coming and the birth of Jesus Christ into the world. Now there hasn't been a great deal of good news of great joy recently in the world in which we live. And the outlook for some of us and for many people around us and indeed throughout the world isn't great either.

Yet it's something we all crave, isn't it? We're all searching for that elusive experience, for that happiness, for that meaning, for the permanence and comfort and joy that we look for in our day to day lives. Now, we ought to do a survey of a thousand people, maybe about a thousand people who are currently trying to cram into the narrow gates of the Christmas market down the road, Waverly, and it seems like there's thousands of people ramming in to get to the Christmas market. Or maybe the 45 or, although I think it might have been 65,000 England and French fans yesterday at the Alcour Stadium or the millions who were watching it on television. If you ask them, what is good news and great joy? Well, I know for half of the fans last night what it certainly wasn't. I wonder how many out of all these thousands of people, millions of people would actually think, oh yeah, actually

[4 : 36] Christianity, that's the very one. That's what will give me good news of great joy. And yet, you know, throughout the world today, there are millions of people whose lives have been changed forever by meeting with, through faith, the living Savior, Jesus Christ, who have invited Christ into their hearts and who know Him as their Lord and Savior. From every different nation, from every different culture, age and background, sometimes from atheistic backgrounds, scientific backgrounds, secular backgrounds, religious backgrounds, today, for them, many, Jesus is the one who brings good news of great joy. Why is that?

Why is that the case? Well, God says in His Word that we are body and soul. They were made to know and to love God and to find the genuine source of love in Him, for Him and for other people. He made us, and He made us to love Him and worship Him. And we're accountable to Him. And nothing in this world, He says, can fill that void. No matter how hard we try, no matter how happy and blessed and joyful we feel without God in our lives, ultimately, He says it's temporary. It's a shadow of the real thing, and it has a brutal hangover. And the reality is, when I look into my own heart, I realize that I fall far short of my own standards. I know I fall short of the standards of my congregation and other people around me here. And then, of course, I know, ultimately, I fall short of God's standard. And in His Word, He gives us His commandments which are His laws of love, His laws of love that just tell us to love Him perfectly and to love others perfectly. It's on a different level to worship Him and love Him perfectly on others. It's something utterly and completely beyond my grasp. There's no chance of me being able to reach His standards and be in relationship with Him because of His holiness and because of His perfect love.

My heart and our hearts are just naturally not conditioned that way. We're rebels against that. We've been singing about it. We're sinners. It's what the Bible calls it. It's a very unfascinating word, and maybe we've got misconceptions about what it means. But everything that we are, everything that we say in many ways in our lives says, well, I'm putting myself first in my hackles, go up, and God is a bit of a brute when He asks me to love Him perfectly and says that I can't meet that standard in the run that is judgment.

How dare He say these things about me until we see Him coming in a manger as a refugee without a home, anonymous for most of His life. And then go into the cross. The lawkeeper who perfectly loved God and loved other people died on the cross as a lawbreaker, one who was guilty before God because he was dying in our place. And he rose again on the third day, having defeated, having paid the price and defeated death for all who trust in Him.

He came to rescue, to redeem a broken and lost and rebellious sinner like me back to Himself. And for any who will come to Jesus, He brings hope and forgiveness. And He expresses the depth of His love and commitment in that sacrificial laying down of His life, taking our guilt on Himself so that we can have that new heart with a greater and better love, a love that can worship Him and put Him first, put others next, and concede ourselves as we were created to be and love ourselves in that light. It's a tough, strong, sacrificial, self-aware, gentle love. And it's His gift that He freely offers to any who come to Him by faith. And that is a love that is eternal when our death is defeated and we go and live with Him as we give Him first place in our hearts. Now, you may doubt that, absolutely.

[9 : 36] You may doubt the truth of Jesus, what the Bible says, what I've said. You may wonder, well, that's just that definition of fake news, it seems right. Or you may feel that our faith or the Bible message is clichéd or sentimental or just for someone else. And I simply want to leave you with two questions that may be a rise out of our time together this evening and looking at this passage. The first is, what do you do with this man, Jesus? You claim to be God? He was born of a virgin, died on a cross, but who walked out of the grave three days later, defeating the power of death and all that it represents.

What if He did? And He claims that He did it because He loves you. And He wants you to know forgiveness and that body and soul love that you were created for, created to enjoy in relationship with Him, worshiping Him as Lord. So that would be my first question for you to consider. My second one is, why is it such good news of great joy for me and for other people who are followers of Jesus and who put their trust in Him, not just for this life to make Him Lord but for eternity and who has turned our lives upside down. I know sometimes it doesn't look like that, but our lives have been turned upside down or inside out maybe from the heart. We've been changed from the heart and it's His gift we haven't done anything to deserve it or done anything to earn it in any way ourselves. But we would be willing to die for Him now because of who He is and because of what He's given to us.

So I just leave you with these two questions and hope that the words that we've been singing and the words that we've been reading from the Bible will have spoken to you and will challenge you and encourage you and excite you and comfort you this evening. Let's pray briefly together. Father God, we thank you for your word. We thank you for the truth of the gospel and the reality that we have come to know in Jesus. We thank you. You've changed our lives that you forgive us freely when we come to you. We don't need to earn anything or make ourselves right with you or look good on the outside. None of these things are things that influence you, but you've come and seen what we need in our death and in our sin and you have provided the answer freely and fully because you love us. It's a long time ago, but it doesn't change the truth of the fact of Christ, God, the Son coming to us as our Creator and Lord, open up the way back into fellowship and friendship with you as we were created to enjoy and to forgive our rebellion. Lord, help us to rejoice in that and thank you that we can sing so much together this evening and thank you for everyone who has made the effort and taken the time to spend this hour with us. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.