

Believe in the Light

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[0 : 00] It's good to be together in the Lord's house, gather round his word. It's good to see those gifts there.

Carol, the Lord bless what you're doing. And we just praise God that this is a God who cares for everyone. There are no exceptions.

He cares for everyone. But that doesn't mean he's the friend of everyone. Because he opposes the proud.

And he gives grace to the humble. So if we're strutting our stuff across the stage of life, and we think we're something special, and we think people should just listen to us, and we should run their lives, or we should run the world, or whatever, we're going to have God for an enemy.

That's the way it works. He's a God who himself has gone to the very depths of humility to reach us and to help us.

[1 : 07] He has died for us. He has entered into the fullness of humiliation. No one was ever more humiliated in all of history than the God that we are here to worship today.

Because just at the very point where he had actually come into this world, and shown the extent of his love, he healed the sick, he raised the dead.

Listen, I'm not telling fairy stories here, folks. There is historical evidence for these things, even outside of the Bible. Jesus is a historical figure.

Let's just pray for a moment, huh? God our Father, we bless you that we're here today, not just because of some nice, cozy little fairy story about a mother having a baby in a manger, because it's not a fairy story.

Mary was a brave woman. Mary was courageous because she could have been stoned to death for being found pregnant outside of marriage when she hadn't yet finalized her marriage with Joseph.

[2 : 29] She knew what she was taking on. And you gave her the courage to be the bearer of our Savior.

We just bless you for that. And all down through history, Lord, you've made brave people out of cowards, ordinary people like us.

And we're all scared when we face things that are way outside of our comfort zones, things that could threaten our very lives or the lives of people we love. We're all scared.

But you can turn every coward into a courageous warrior of love. And only you can do that, Lord. And so we bless and praise you, living God, that we stand today not on fairy stories, not on cleverly devised fables.

We stand on solid rock. We stand on historical events. We stand on facts that you yourself have established. And the greatest fact of all, Father, is you.

[3 : 42] You are the greatest reality in the universe. We awaken in the morning and we speak to your son, our closest friend, who died 2,000 years ago.

How could that be possible? How can we speak to someone who died 2,000 years ago? Because he lives. Because he came to die in order to overcome death for us.

God, our Father, we bless you for this. And in Jesus' name, we pray you'd be with us in this short time together as we gather around your word and just try to listen for your voice speaking into our hearts, Lord.

Because you can take every single person here today and if we need it, if we need it, you can take our life and turn it around 180 degrees until we're facing the right direction.

Because if we face the wrong direction, if we're walking away from you and we don't realize it, Father, the future is too terrible to contemplate. But we pray in Jesus' name that you would see to it, Lord, that we're all facing the same direction and we're moving towards the glorious celestial city that you have and all the riches that are stored up for those who love you and who are grateful to you for what you have done for us.

[5 : 05] In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Let's just hear why Jesus came.

It's not often understood why Jesus came. Did he come just to be a loving, caring person? Was he just a good teacher? Is that all he was? Because we've had lots of good teachers down through the centuries.

Was he just a kind person? Well, that could lead you to thousands upon thousands of people who've got no Christian faith at all and they're very, very kind.

So was Jesus just kind? Or was there anything unique about him? Was he special in any way? Let me tell you why he came. It's here in the book of Hebrews, chapter 2, verses 14 to 15.

Since, therefore, the children, now it's talking about the children of God, since, therefore, the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of flesh and blood, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that's the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

[6 : 27] That's why Jesus came. The Bible actually says it in another part.

He abolished death and brought life and immortality to life. People didn't know it was possible that you could really live.

Because, you see, we tend to think that life is just a biological thing. You know, okay, you're breathing, your heart's beating, you're alive. Well, actually, no, according to the Bible, you don't start to live until you know Jesus.

That's the reality. It's like we're walking dead. We're alive. We're breathing. Our hearts are beating. But we don't know what life is without Jesus.

Because he is the life giver. He's the one who brings you a quality of life, a dimension of life, a power of life. And it's resurrection life.

[7 : 27] It's not just the life of another human being. It's the life of God himself that is given to us. We're in John chapter 12 today.

I'm just going to read a wee bit of it. We're at verse 27. Jesus, to let you understand what's been going on here, Jesus is making his way towards Jerusalem.

He's, just a week or so ago, he got news that his close friend, Lazarus, who lived in a wee village called Bethany, very near Jerusalem, that Lazarus was very sick.

And we're told, it's a really strange thing. Now this doesn't sound like a loving Jesus at all. We're told that when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed where he was for another two days.

Now, Jesus loved Lazarus. They were really close friends. Lazarus had two sisters, Mary and Martha.

- [8 : 37] They lived in a little village, Bethany. And, and Jesus was very, very fond of this family. This was a home where he could feel at peace. He had enemies all over the place, but in that one house, he could go there and he could be completely at rest because he was surrounded by friends and by love.
- And so he hears that Lazarus is sick. And what does he do? Does he rush to his bedside? No, he doesn't. And his disciples can't understand, Lord, you know, and then word comes that Lazarus has died.
- And the disciples are just confused. They can't understand. And Jesus says, I am glad for your sakes that this has happened like this. I'm glad for your sakes.
- This is, this is a learning part on the curve for you. You're going to learn something through this that you would never have learned otherwise. And so they head for Bethany.
- And by the time they get there, Lazarus has been in the tomb for four days. And we're told that when Jesus saw them all, heard them all weeping, it says it was indignant.
- [9 : 59] Well, actually, it says in my Bible it was indignant. But actually, if you, if you'd heard the word in the original language, you would have heard, he snorted with anger. That's literally what the word means.
- He snorted with anger. All this weeping that was going on. Was he angry at them for being, for being sad? No. He was angry because they were afraid of death.
- Because these people were living with the fear of death. I was speaking in an online meeting a while back. And there was an online congregation there.
- And I'd been talking about some of the stresses that people are facing today. And I said, I think one of the biggest stresses people face, and we don't really take it seriously enough, is the fear of death.
- And the fear of dying. And unknown to me, because it was an interactive thing, unknown to me, there was a lady in the congregation who introduced herself and said she had been a clinical psychologist for the past 25 years.
- [11 : 09] And she said, I would have to endorse what's just been said, because I would say that easily 95 to 98 percent of my patients have all had a deep-rooted fear of death at the core of all their problems, emotional, mental, whatever they were.
- So this fear of death, it keeps people in a place of slavery. If you're afraid, you can be controlled. If somebody has something that makes you afraid about them, they can actually manipulate your entire life.
- They can control your behavior. And Satan is a real person. The Bible says he's a real person. Jesus spoke to him as a real person.
- And unless you're prepared to believe that Jesus himself had mental problems and was just imagining all this, then if Jesus was talking to the devil, you'd better believe he's real.
- And Satan is a real person who keeps people enslaved by the fear of death. And Jesus came to destroy death because that, therefore, destroys the means by which Satan can control people's lives.
- [12 : 25] And if fear is gone, if your fear of death is gone, you don't need to be afraid of anything at all. Just imagine thinking that God is so much on your side that you don't even need to fear death.
- Wow. You know, this is Christmas time and it's a good time to think of giving and generosity and kindness.
- But let me ask you this. Can you imagine a more generous gift than for God to give his own son to die in your place and mine?

Because the Bible says Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring us to God.

The righteous for the unrighteous. Now, that doesn't sound like fair, does it? It doesn't sound fair. Why would a righteous person die for the unrighteous? But that's exactly what God did.

[13 : 40] And I was once accused when I preached this, I was once accused of being barbaric. David, that's barbaric. And your God is barbaric. You're telling me that he took someone who was completely innocent and put him on a cross to die for the sake of people who were all guilty.

I said, that's exactly what I've just preached. That's right. I stand by that. He said, that's barbarism. I said, where's the barbarism? I said, who was on the cross?

Who was on that cross? The Bible says, God, God, was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, not counting men's sins against them.

It's God himself who went through the suffering. It's God himself who paid the price and made the sacrifice once for all.

Where's the barbarism? And that, that is the purest, most astonishing love in the universe. There's no barbarism there.

[14 : 52] This is God saying, you're all guilty. And you stand before the bar, you stand in the courtroom and you're standing there and you're condemned. There is not a word you can say for yourself because you know that you have broken God's commandments.

You know that you're guilty. And then your eyes pop out of your head when you suddenly realize that the judge actually loves you and is going to pay the price for your sin.

this is what Jesus said. This is John chapter 12. At verse 27, now, now is my soul troubled and what shall I say?

He says, Father, save me from this hour. Will I say that? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.

And then a voice came from heaven. I have glorified it and I will glorify it again. And the crowd that stood there and heard this said that it had thundered and some of them said, well, an angel has spoken to him.

[16 : 02] But Jesus answered, this voice has come for your sake, not mine. Now is the judgment of this world. Now will the ruler of this world be cast out and I, when I am lifted up from the earth by which he meant his crucifixion, I will draw all people to myself.

And he said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die. So the crowd answered him, we've heard from the law that the Christ remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up?

Who is this Son of Man? You need to understand here, these people weren't answering, weren't interested in Jesus' answers. They didn't want the answers.

They just wanted to ask the questions because they were trying to make him accountable to them. But when they got his answers, they became accountable to him. So Jesus said to them, the light is among you.

It's among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness doesn't know where he's going.

[17 : 11] While you have the light, believe in the light that you may become sons of light. I just want to think about these two little verses here this morning. Give me just a sec until I sort this.

There we are. It's better. There we are. What's Jesus saying here?

He's making a division in time. He's actually saying there was a time when the light wasn't here and there's a time right now where the light is with you and there's another division in time coming very soon because the light is going to be taken away and the darkness will come in right behind it.

that's an absolutely astonishing statement. A person who talks like this is either a liar or a lunatic or he's Lord.

Those are the only conclusions we can come to. Now when you know Jesus' track record you read the Bible and it's a historical document, this Bible. It's full of biographies that were written by people who actually kept company with him and when you compare them people say oh yeah but Mark tells it differently from Matthew and Matthew tells it differently from John and I would say I do really well hope so because if I rounded up a bunch of twelve witnesses and they all said exactly the same thing I would think they were all just you know spinning a yarn and they would collaborated and colluded over their testimony but if somebody tells me I've got twelve witnesses about a terrible accident that happened and somebody says oh well it looked like this and somebody else says well it looked like that I put all the bits together and it's obvious that somebody was watching it from five hundred yards away and somebody was actually involved in it and somebody else saw it from an airplane or a helicopter or whatever but when you put all the pieces together it's the same incident it's the same thing and this Bible here was written by about forty people over fourteen hundred years and from

[19 : 31] Genesis to Revelation it's saying the same message all the way through God is love God is a saviour God is against our sin but he's for us against our sin that's from Genesis to Revelation it's all the way through forty different people over fourteen hundred years and they've all managed to say the same thing how wonderful is that brothers and sisters friends Jesus is saying something absolutely colossal here walk while you have the light lest the darkness overtake you when it says overtake it's a strong strong word it's not talking about darkness coming in fast it's not the speed of the darkness overtaking it's the violence of the darkness darkness that's what the original language means darkness will grab a hold of your life and it will take you and shake you around until you don't know which way is up and the darkness will be so dark that you can't see your hand in front of your face and you don't know where you're going let me tell you this if you if you're walking in darkness and you don't know where you're going my goodness would you want to be on a jumbo jet where an electrical storm had knocked out all the instruments and the pilot was flying blind and he couldn't navigate and he didn't know how high he is off the ground and he doesn't know what direction he's going and he doesn't know how much fuel he's got left would you want to be on that jet

Jesus is saying that's where you are you're on that jet without him you're just flying blind you're just hoping for the best but when you get to your destination it's not where you're going to want to be Jesus is the only safe pilot that we have he's the only one who can take us carefully and kindly and generously and guarantee that he will get us safely to the place we want to be at the side of God you know I had a an incident a few years ago some of us we had put some events on in the church hall for the kids around Christmas time and various schools had sent children along we had about 250 kids from about five schools who came and we had a wonderful time we were doing silly things forgetting how old we were and playing games and stuff and it was great fun but at one of the coffee breaks I was sitting talking to a few of the teachers and one of the teachers said to me oh she said it's so lovely that you're teaching the children about religion and honestly I hadn't thought about my answer I hadn't taken any time to consider it it was out of my mouth before

I realised it she said it's lovely that you're teaching the children about religion I said oh I hope we're not doing that and she looked at me like I had just grown horns she said what are you talking about I said I said we don't want to teach the children how to be religious God forbid that we try to teach them how to be religious I said how do you understand religion what do people think religion is isn't religion about ticking boxes and doing this and doing that and making sure that's done and not doing this and not doing that and hoping that it all tallies up somehow and that when we get to heaven somehow or other God will be sufficiently impressed we've done more good than we've done bad and God will say well you've done your best come on in isn't that how we understand religion isn't it all about trying to impress God and she said to me you know I never thought about it but she says I suppose that's exactly what religion is about

I said well that's the exact opposite of what we're trying to teach the kids it's the exact opposite what we want to teach the children is that God is someone who is impressive there is nothing more exciting nothing more wonderful nothing more thrilling than to get to know God himself his love is completely off the scale his mercy is off the scale his kindness is off the scale you don't have a unit of measurement for the love and the grace and the mercy and the kindness of God you just don't have it his grace is so so utterly wonderful you know what grace is grace is God giving us what we don't deserve and his mercy do you know what his mercy is his mercy is him withholding what we do deserve and that's why

Jesus was on the cross Jesus received what we deserved and Isaiah had said 700 years before that that's exactly what would happen oh God our father we we bless you our savior took the blame for us he took the punishment for us he paid the price for us he absorbed all the wrath of God for us because he was not only man he was also God because he was God he could not sin and did not sin for 33 solid years the devil and the powers of darkness tried to provoke this man to sin just once because if he had sinned just once he would not have been a spotless sacrifice for sin but because he never sinned when he went to the cross as a sacrifice for our sin he was acceptable to the father because there was no sin in him there was no power of darkness could hold him and death could not hold him prisoner because he had never sinned and he was the spotless sacrifice that you and I could never have given to God

[26 : 12] I don't know about you but I think that's exciting I think that's amazing that God would come up with a plan like that oh I need a drink Jesus is saying to these people walk with the light while you have the light while you have it you know there's a day coming when the light won't be available to us anymore we need to humble ourselves oh come on isn't the worst isn't human pride just utterly shamed before the cross a man who's completely and utterly faultless and sinless and who's spent his entire life doing nothing but good and he's hanging on the cross naked like a criminal with people spitting at him and people piercing his side with a spear and pushing nails through his hands and his feet and they're doing all this because the father is accepting his spotless son as a sacrifice once for all for all humanity that's what's happening at

Calvary that's what's happening on the cross what a God we serve he would go to such lengths to save us and that's the name of Jesus Mary was told by the angel you shall call his name Jesus because he will save his people not from the Romans but from their sins do you know that the worst enemy you will ever meet you'll see in the mirror when you go home the worst enemy you'll ever meet is your own self the worst danger you'll ever face is your own unbelief and it was unbelief that kept an entire generation of Israelites out of the promised land they wouldn't believe God they wouldn't trust him well my brothers and sisters and our friends I'm just I'm pleading today I'm just pleading today don't let anyone go from here disbelieving me I'm really saying you need to believe what

I'm saying because I don't know if you've got another breath in five minutes time neither do you we just don't know when that moment's going to come when it's time to face our maker and I tell you this if I have to face my maker right now and I step out of the lift in front of the pearly gates I think there'll be a lift don't you if I step out of the lift in front of the pearly gates and Peter says to me David what are you doing here why are you here I'll say well because because he because he died in my place because because he did it because he paid the price and Peter Peter's face will light up and say oh you belong here but you know if I should step out of that lift and Peter says why are you here David and I say well because well because well because

I believe because because I because I bake cakes for the church because because I help people because I'm kind to the poor Peter Peter's face would fall and they say well what are you doing here David you don't belong here you don't need a saviour you're your own saviour you think you're good enough you've just made a mockery of Jesus dying on the cross because Jesus is not a fool he did not die on a cross for people who don't need him he said that he said I haven't come for the healthy I've come for the sick please folks don't leave here today making out that God doesn't know what he's talking about and that God was a fool to send his son to die on a cross when you don't need it if I reckon it's the other way around I think if someone of God's intelligence has sent you a saviour you should take that seriously and say I must need a saviour if God thinks that way

I must need a saviour better put myself right with God and the only way to do it is not by anything I do but by what he's done because and here I finish with this point we are not here today to impress God there is nothing we've done here today that we've done to impress God anything we've done here today is because we're impressed by what God has done for us Amen Do I hear an Amen Let's pray O Lord God our Heavenly Father we praise you that you have given us an opportunity to grab a hold of the light lest the darkness should grab a hold of us we bless you today that you have poured out such kindness upon us we here today who are Christians we can say with the

[31 : 58] Apostle John see what love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called the children of God and that is what we are Father if there's anyone here today who can't honestly say that they're a child of God I know Father and you know Father that they could leave here with that testimony they could actually go through those doors today saying I'm a child of God I have just been rescued from hell's orphanage and brought into the Father's love and embrace Father we bless you for the power of your love and your mercy and your goodness your kindness you're off the scale kindness we bless you in Jesus name help us reach out for all that you have done for us help us not try to impress you but help us give us such insight from the

Holy Spirit that we really are truly and utterly and always impressed with what you have done for us and who you are we want to know you Lord may it be so for your glory in Jesus name Amen