

Great Gift: Making the Gift a Reality

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[0 : 0 0] with the fall as people turned against God. So our relationships with God, with each other, and with the world broke. But the promise was that God would put it right again, and that's what we're looking at this morning, how that gift becomes a reality through Jesus Christ.

So let's pray, and then we will look at God's Word. Father, you are the giver of great gifts.

You have given us physical life, health and strength to be here today, friends and family. And we need the gift of your Holy Spirit.

We need your power to be at work in our lives. And so we pray that as we read your Word, stories, ideas that may be familiar, would penetrate past our minds and our heads, deep into our hearts, affecting us and changing us, and causing us to see the wonder of Jesus and the gift that he has come to bring.

So we ask for your help. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Well, I hope you've all been getting some cards in the post or delivered from friends.

[1 : 4 1] We've been getting some cards. And here's what one card says. On the front there was the big words, Peace. And inside, Have a Happy Christmas.

Close the card. Turn on the news. And we have a very different picture. The mindless murder of eight children in Australia. A mudslide in Indonesia that's covered a whole village.

The attack on a school in Pakistan, which left 140 dead. And the sad news of two homeless people being pulled out of the River Lee at the beginning of the week.

It's not very peaceful, and it doesn't sound very happy. Here's what another card said. May each wish you make, now Christmas is here, come true to make this an especially good year.

What do you wish for? Well, I wish for a better world. I wish where bad things don't happen, that it really would be peaceful and happy.

[2 : 5 8] But no matter how much I wish, I can't fix the sadness and the brokenness.

Here's what another card said. On the inside it simply said, Jesus, thanks be to God for this indescribable gift.

It's telling us, or it's pointing us, that what we all wish for, all that we want, is made possible through the person of Jesus Christ.

Jesus was the God-man come to earth, born to reverse this disordered world, and redeem broken lives.

That's the message. And we're going to see how that is true this morning. First, Jesus is revealed.

[3 : 5 9] 600 years, quite a long time, 600 years before Jesus was born, his birth was announced through the prophet Isaiah.

You can read it on the screen. Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign. This was the announcement. And here's the sign that you know he's coming.

A virgin will be with child, and will give birth to a son, and will call him Emmanuel. Did it come true? Well, in Matthew's Gospel, 600 years later, we read all about a young woman by the name of Mary, who was pregnant, even though she was a virgin.

And this is what it says in Matthew. All of this, this birth, took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet, the prophet Isaiah.

The virgin will be with child, and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Emmanuel, which means God with us. It's extraordinary.

[5 : 09] It is a miracle. This child announced, all those hundreds of years ago, born into this world, God, the man, coming to earth.

But Isaiah just doesn't want to tell us about the birth of Jesus. Isaiah actually goes on to tell us what this child will do, or rather, what it will be like when this child arrives, when he comes.

Have a look in your Bibles at Isaiah chapter 9. The reading we just had. Isaiah chapter 9. And to really understand chapter 9, we have to finish off the end of chapter 8.

So let's read the last verse of chapter 8, verse 22. It's telling us something. Then they will look towards the earth, and see only distress, and darkness, and fearful gloom, and they will be thrust into utter darkness.

This is talking about what life will be like for God's people because they had ignored God, they had rebelled against God, they had gone against Him, and this was a sign of God's judgment because of their rebellion.

[6 : 35] There would be distress, there would be darkness, and fearful gloom. In fact, that verse is a great summary, isn't it, of what the world is like today.

Because of our ongoing sin, because of our refusal to listen to God, because we've pushed Him out of our lives, we live with distress, we live in darkness, and people face fearful gloom.

It pictures a world of chaos and disorder. But God promises to change and transform all of that. So let's read into chapter 9, verse 1. Look at the contrast.

Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past, He humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, that's the region around Galilee.

But in the future, He will honour the Galilee of the Gentiles by the way of the sea along the Jordan. So God is promising that He's going to reverse and redeem and change it all.

[7 : 46] Verse 2. The people who are walking in darkness have seen a great light on those living in the land of the shadow of death.

A light has dawned. Now this is not about the invention of the lightbulb so that we can all see at night. This is a promise of someone, of something much greater.

A light will come. A light that's going to dispel the darkness from our lives and deliver us from distress. And the reason for this dramatic change and transformation, we'll look down at verse 6.

For to us a child is born. To us people like you and me a son is given.

The promised child is going to be the one who will bring deliverance to the darkness and distress. Is it true?

[8 : 57] Well, look at Matthew chapter 4. Go to Matthew's Gospel. We're going to stay in Matthew for the duration of our time. Matthew chapter 4 and verse 12.

So the beginning of Matthew has announced the birth of Jesus. Jesus has arrived and Matthew chapter 4 begins into the start of Jesus' ministry.

And look what Jesus says. Chapter 4 verse 12. When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, Jesus returned to Galilee.

Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of where? Zebulun and Naphtali. Ring any bells?

To fulfil what was said through the prophet Isaiah. Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles, the people living in darkness have seen a great light.

[10 : 11] On those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned. are we making the connections? Have the lights gone on in our own minds? Jesus is saying, I am the one that Isaiah spoke about.

I am the one that everybody has been waiting for. It's taken 600 years, but now I'm here. I've arrived. I am the light.

It's me. I've come to dispel the darkness from your lives. I am the one who's come to deliver you from distress. We might summarise Jesus' ministry like this.

Number two, Jesus has come to reverse our disordered world. Denzel Washington, a film star if you don't know who he is, stars in a film called *Déjà Vu*.

The film opens with a terrible scene. There's been a terrorist attack in the US. There's chaos and carnage everywhere. Hundreds of people have been killed.

[11 : 25] And Doug Carlin, played by Washington, arrives on the scene. And with the help of his fellow teammates, they've been working on a special project and he enters into what's called a time window, which basically sends him back in time.

The aim, they don't know if it's going to work, but the aim is to undo what has happened. To reverse the terrorist attack.

Now, what captures the imagination for people watching it is, we all want to do that. We all want to be able to go back in time.

We would all love to be able to change what's happened. As we rehearse the events of our lives, we want to go back and undo the past.

We want to reverse the circumstances of our lives and wish I hadn't done that or hadn't said that or wish things were different and wish that it wasn't like this. We want to undo so that things are better.

[12 : 31] that's why Jesus came. He came to undo the effects of sin.

He burst into real time. He came to reverse the disorder and the brokenness of our lives. Is it true? Well, let's see how he does that.

Look at Matthew's Gospel, chapter 8. We're going to look at two chapters here, Matthew chapter 8 and 9, which really immerse us into the ministry and the life of Jesus as he began to walk and experience life on this earth.

Matthew chapter 8 shows us what this Jesus came to do. Three things. We're going to read through this real quickly, so follow along with me.

First, he delivers from distress. Verse 1, when Jesus came down the mountainside, large crowds followed him, a man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, Lord, if you're willing, you can make me clean.

[13 : 39] Now, the equivalent today, in terms of medical or social effects, might be Ebola. There was no cure for leprosy. There was no means of treatment for it.

If you had it, well, you died. You were untouchable. You were shut out of your community. You were left alone to die by yourself. Verse 3, but Jesus reached out his hand and he touched the man.

I am willing, he said, be clean. And immediately he was cured of his leprosy. This man was not just cured physically, he was now accepted socially.

A life changed. Verse 5, Jesus entered Capernaum. A centurion came to him asking for help. Lord, he said, my servant lies at home paralyzed and in terrible suffering.

Jesus said to him, I will go and heal him. Again, here we have an irreversible situation. This man is paralyzed. We don't know, did he have an accident?

[14 : 47] But he can't move, he can't do anything, and nobody can save him. Verse 13, then, Jesus said to then centurion, go, it will be done just as you believed it would, and his servant was healed at that very hour.

A man's life completely transformed, he can now walk and work. Verse 14, when Jesus came into Peter's house, he saw Peter's mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever.

He touched her hand and the fever left her, and she got up and began to wait on him. And when evening came, many who were demon possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick.

What an incredible scene we have here. No tablets, no surgery, no doctors, everyone healed by just a touch or a spoken word. Why did all of these things happen?

Look at verse 17, this was to fulfil what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah. He, Jesus, took up our infirmities and carried our diseases.

[16 : 03] Jesus was the one Isaiah had spoken about, the one who would come to reverse the effects of this sin-cursed, broken world.

world. He came to undo it all. Second, he came to dispel the darkness. Look at verse 23, Jesus got into the boat and his disciples followed him.

Without warning, a furious storm came up on the lake so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. The disciples went and woke him saying, Lord, save us, we're going to drown.

Do you remember what we said about the sea the other week when we were looking in Revelation 21? The sea represented the forces of chaos and disorder.

Back then you didn't have jet skis and power boats to mess about in. People didn't go to sunbathe and treat it like a pleasure place. The sea or the lake was dangerous.

[17 : 09] It was a place of fear and darkness. You lost your life out there. verse 26 Jesus replied, you of little faith, why are you so afraid?

Then he got up and he rebuked the winds and the waves and it was completely calm. Jesus has come, you see, to end the fearful gloom.

He has come to dispel the chaos of darkness. Or verse 28, look at this scene here. when he arrived at the other side of the region of the Gadarenes, two demon possessed men came coming from the tombs and they met him.

They were so violent that no one could pass that way. They literally are the living dead. Their home is the local graveyard in the tombs.

These are the kind of characters that if you met them today would be locked away in an isolation cell. Medicine can't help them. Psychologists have given up. They're a lost cause.

[18 : 18] And nobody dared go near them because they are quite literally demonic. The forces of darkness have ruined their lives. Verse 29, what do you want with us, son of God?

they shouted. Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time? You see, they knew that their end would be worse than their present existence. Utter darkness awaited them.

Judgment would only destroy them. But Jesus came to dispel the darkness from people's lives.

Verse 30, some distance from them a large herd of pigs was feeding. The demons begged Jesus, if you drive us out, send us into the herd of pigs. He said to them, go.

So they came out and they went into the pigs and the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and died in the water. Now don't be worried about the little pigs with their little pink curly tails.

[19 : 20] It's not about the pigs. People are far greater value than animals. Jesus has come to deal with people. He's come to rescue people.

He's come to deal with the darkness to set them free. But he also comes to deal with death.

Look at chapter 9 verse 18. While he was saying this, a ruler came and knelt before Jesus and said, my daughter has just died.

Come, put your hand on her and she will live. And Jesus got up and went with him and so did his disciples. The greatest tragedy that you or I can face in this world is death.

It's what happens to every single one of us and we cannot escape it. It robs us of our loved ones. It steals away our joy and our happiness.

[20 : 29] Verse 20. Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for 12 years came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak. She said to herself, if only I can touch his cloak, I will be healed.

A terrible condition this woman has and there's only one end to it. It's going to end in death. She knows the seriousness of her situation. Verse 22.

Jesus turned and saw her. Take heart, daughter, he said. Your faith has healed you. And the woman was healed from that moment. With amazing power, Jesus prevents certain death.

But more than that, he deals with death itself. Verse 23. When Jesus entered the ruler's house and saw the flute players and the noisy crowd, he said, go away, the girl's not dead, but asleep.

But they laughed at him. After the crowd had been put outside, he went in and he took the girl by her hand and she got up. Raised to life.

[21 : 44] Why does Jesus do all of these things? Well, two big reasons. The first reason he does all of these amazing things is to reveal who he is.

To show people to the world, to show people like you and me, that I am, says Jesus, the God man with absolute power and supreme authority.

I am God Emmanuel, God with us, the one who rules this world, the one who controls all of life. I am in charge. And second, it tells us what he has come to do.

That Jesus entered into the darkness and distress of this world to reverse the disordered world. He came to undo the effects of the sin and curse.

So when Jesus heals sickness, when Jesus calmed the storm, when Jesus raised the dead, when Jesus interacted with these people and transformed their lives, he was giving people and giving us a glimpse and a picture of what he is going to bring about finally and fully when he comes again.

[23 : 04] For all who have faith in him, this is the kingdom. I rescue you from a kingdom of darkness and bring you into a kingdom of light. And when Jesus entered into the world, the process, began, the reversing and the undoing has started.

And one day, it will all be completed and will be fully realized by all who trust in him when he comes again.

The big question for us is how do we enter into this experience? how can people like you and me be sure that this gift is for us and what Jesus did then is going to be ours?

Well, third, Jesus has come to redeem our broken lives. You see, Jesus lived on this earth for just a few years.

things. And just for a little while, he began to give us a glimpse and a picture of what he would do. And what he did, as we read in chapters 8 and 9, he has secured for us for an eternity when he went to the cross.

[24 : 30] What he did for those few people then, he has secured for us for an eternity when he went to the cross. Let's go to Matthew chapter 27 verse 45.

Matthew 27 verse 45. And as we read down through a few verses here, I want us to look out for three extraordinary events that happen and take place.

Verse 45. From the sixth hour, that's twelve midday, until the ninth hour, that's three in the afternoon, darkness came over all the land.

About the ninth hour, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani, which means, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? When some of those standing there heard this, they said, he's calling Elijah.

Immediately, one of them ran and got a sponge, he filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, and he offered it up to Jesus to drink. The rest said, now leave him alone, let's see if Elijah comes to save him.

[25 : 53] And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. at that moment, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom, the earth shook, the rocks split, the tombs broke open, and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life.

They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many people. Did you pick up on those three extraordinary events as Jesus died?

Something cosmic happened when Jesus died. First, there was the darkness. Look at verse 45.

From the sixth hour till the ninth hour, darkness, darkness over the whole land. from twelve noon to three in the afternoon when the sun is at its highest and at its brightest, it went completely dark.

Why? Well, look what Jesus says as he dies at the end of verse 46. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? The darkness of judgment was falling on Jesus so that you and I might experience the light of life.

[27 : 26] Because God's response to this disordered world, his response to our sinful lives is to judge and he is right to do so. We've messed it up.

We've broken his good gifts that he's given to us. But in his redeeming love, Jesus, the God man, comes to earth and says I will take the darkness upon me.

I will take the judgment of God for you and for me. And so he comes to forgive all of our sins from the past to the present and into the future.

he takes the darkness so that we don't have to face it. Second, there's the curtain.

Verse 51, at that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. Just as the darkness fell on the land, this is a supernatural act.

[28 : 36] This isn't a human doing something. This is God intervening into this world. The curtain in the temple acted like this huge barrier between God and people.

It was this big statement to say keep out, stay away, no entry, you're not allowed in here. Sinful, broken, messed up people can't be with God.

But by the redeeming death of Jesus, the way is opened, that curtain ripped from top to bottom, a sign of God's action, tears it apart, and he says, come in, you're welcome, you're accepted, I have come to bridge the gap.

The work of Jesus on the cross bridges brokenness between man and God, and it spans the chasm between heaven and earth.

And then there was the graves that opened. Verse 52, what an extraordinary scene. As Jesus died, the moment he died, verse 52, the tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life.

[30 : 07] What a spectacular sight. Could you imagine? he'd be frightened. People walking out of their tombs.

Jesus' own death is there to tell us that his death is the means to defeat all death. Jesus is showing us what he will do for us when we die.

When I die, the grave is not the end. It is simply a doorway into his good and perfect and eternal kingdom. Just like the little girl that we read about in Matthew 9.

It's like we just fall asleep and just wake up as you do in the morning, in the presence of God, in the kingdom of light, to be with him forever and for ever.

You see, the cross is the focus. The cross is the means to reverse the disorder world that we live in.

[31 : 25] It's the means to undo the brokenness that we see all around us. Jesus. It's begun. It's started when Jesus died.

No, it's not yet complete. That's why you and I still experience suffering and struggles each and every day. But we have Jesus who entered into our world, Emmanuel, God with us, who doesn't abandon us in our struggles, who doesn't leave us in our suffering, but the one who said, I will be with you, the one who said, I will walk with you through this life, and I will make sure that you will be with me in my kingdom.

He forgives our past. He fills us with the power of his Holy Spirit, so that we can begin to live changed and transformed lives. He gives us the sure and certain hope of life with him.

Jesus has come, and Jesus has come to restore and to redeem and to put things right. And as we look at the cross, that's where it starts.

do not take your eyes off Christ. Focus there, and know the life that he has come to bring.

[33 : 05] Let's pray together. Amen. Lord Jesus, we are truly amazed at what you have done and what you have promised you will do and what you are doing in our lives today.

We thank you that you have come to restore and renew, to dispel the darkness, to deal with the distress, to bring forgiveness, to bring peace, to bring change and transformation.

Lord, we thank you so much for Jesus, and we pray that we will keep our eyes fixed on him, and that where we need your help, you would enter into our suffering and into our struggles.

Enable us and equip us. Provide for us, we pray. we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

We're going to sing together a great carol, a great hymn. Hark the herald angels sing, glory to the new born King, peace on earth, and mercy mild God and sinners reconciles.

[34 : 58] Jesus has come, and Jesus has come to renew and restore, so let's praise him and give him thanks. Amen. Thank you.