

The believer and the world

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[0:00] This is an unpleasant thing to think of, the terrible earthquakes that have happened, such! a sad scene it hardly bears thinking about, but just think of another thing that we've seen on the telly with scenes of disaster. You think of the firefighters that are working there, risking their lives. Think of the rescue crews who perhaps have got on a plane from one place and travelled thousands of miles to help and to rescue. Think of the people perhaps digging away with their bare hands, at cost of themselves to try and show mercy. The medics who perhaps have left busy jobs and are having sleepless nights, looking after these poor people who need their help. And the doctors who perhaps have given up lucrative jobs to go and help there. And we think of courage and kindness and compassion and love. And I think we've got another similar story coming as we look at this matter of what Jesus says about the world. But I don't want to give too much of the game away. Please turn to John 14 and around there. And I'll just give a little bit of the context.

This is a major section in John's Gospel because it's a major event in the life of Jesus and the life of his followers. He's going away. He's led and trained this group of 12 men for three years. They are called disciples because they are what disciples are. Learners, followers, lovers of Jesus in a way. They're also called apostles because shortly they're going to be sent. Apostello means to send. So they're going to be sent out as messengers or ambassadors or spokesmen. And in this particular point at Jesus's life, Lazarus is being raised from the dead. And that's recorded in chapter 11. And Jesus enters Jerusalem triumphantly. Think, wow, everybody's shouting out, hooray, hooray, as Jesus enters Jerusalem. And it's so popular. He's so popular that in chapter 12, verse 19, his opponents could say, the whole world has gone after him. Everybody thinks Jesus is great. And then we come to this sudden shock that Jesus announces after these triumphs and successes, has announced like a bombshell. He's said, somebody is going to betray me. That's not the right verse, though, is it? He's leaving and he says, it's 1321. Jesus was troubled in spirit and says, truly, truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me. A sudden shock. I mean, he's actually spoken about this before, but it comes across as a shock. And he says things like this, I came from the Father and have come into the world. And now I am leaving the world and going to the Father. And the disciples are trying to understand this and cope with it and process this, that he's going to be departing. And how will they manage without him? And what is it like going to be managing without the physical presence of Jesus? And as I mentioned on a previous occasion, it seems to me that in this chapter, there's a bundle of threads that keep on coming to the surface or keep on being twined up with one another about this whole matter of how these people and us too will manage without Jesus being present. And one of the big factors in these chapters, as Daniel was teaching us the other Sunday, that he sends a comforter. He sends the person of the Holy Spirit.

[4:10] And such is the reality of the Trinity that if the Spirit comes, then it's almost indistinguishable from Jesus himself being there. And Jesus will say, I will come, or my Father will come. So the presence of the comforter, the presence of Jesus and the Father. And then as Steve was telling us the other Sunday, we're connected to Jesus like mobile phones connected to the internet.

Abide in me, just like branches abiding in the vine. If you lose that connection, the branches die. If they have that connection, they live and they grow. And Jesus says, abide in me, which is one of the things that Enid really did. And so we come away from those things learning to abide in him, that

his word should abide in us, which is another way of saying it's a good idea to read our Bibles. Loving him, obeying him, abiding in his love. He says a lot about that. It's all twined up together. If you love me, you will obey my commandments. And we abide in him by walking in obedience and abiding in his love. And then another strand is this strand of prayer, which we thought about the other time. And another strand is that the particular command he gives is to love one another. So we've got all these sort of rather wonderful threads running through these chapters and forming a wonderful sort of tapestry of the Christian life. So it's a very wonderful and positive picture. And I hope that as we've been going through this, some of it has at least stuck in our minds as saying, this is really wonderful things to think about. And we can relish them and feed on them. And I'm going to say, but. But the things that Jesus teaches here are not all positive.

They're not all positive. There's a but. There's one other ingredient in what he teaches, which is this thing called the world. And that's what we're going to look at this morning. And actually, he's already mentioned the world. And I went through my Bible, I went through John's gospel, picking out all the times Jesus says the world. And I was surprised how often he mentions it and how often key teachings are linked to the world. And you can guess this one. So anybody like to say what the blank is there? I am the bread who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. And I am the light of the world. And this one, God so loved the world. Ah, well, interesting. I should hide that one because I'm going to come to that one later. There's actually lots of times Jesus has referred to the world. And I'd like us to think about it. I hope this will be a helpful thing. I think there are four ways that we could look at this. Number one, a region of creation. Number two, a population across the nations. Number three, a race in rebellion. And number four, a rescue operation.

You can see I tried to put shuns in there, but I failed completely on the third one. A region of creation, a population across the nations, a race in rebellion. Couldn't get any shuns there. A rescue operation. So let's do those one at a time. So when Jesus talks about the world, one way of looking at it and one way of understanding it, a war angle on this, shall we say, it's a region of creation. So the Bible invites us to think of creation in different regions. So there's heaven where God is and the angels are. We can't get there. That's a different region.

Jesus says, where I'm going, you cannot come. You know, we can't take a trip to heaven. You may remember the original cosmonauts tried to pour scorn on the idea of there being a heaven because they got up in their spacecraft and said, you know, I cannot see God here, as if that proved anything.

[8:33] It's not a geographical area that you can get to by traveling far enough. It's a spiritual distinction. There's heaven, God and the angels. And below that is the created world with earth and trees and animals and people. People become important in this in a moment.

And at various points, Jesus says, I came from heaven to earth. I came from above to this world. And that movement is a remarkable one. And of course, he says, I came from the Father and I'm going to the Father. So he comes from and he's going back. And the going back probably is another subject. But I say, just before we leave that simple distinction, I haven't even given you a reference, so I'm like, why would he bother to do that? Why would he leave the glory of heaven and the Father to come down here? What is the Son of God doing on earth? And it isn't a random thing because he's been commanded. Just look at these verses. I'm going to try and do these fairly quickly. 1718, what did he say there? He says, he says, you sent me into the world. And 1431, 1431 says, oh no, that's a different, the world may know I love the Father. I do as the Father has commanded me so that the world may know that I love the Father. He's not here by accident. He's not a tourist. He's come for some particular mission. Why has he come here? What's he doing here? I put a little picture of our king in the

Bundesstaat. That's King Charles. And if you were there in the German parliament, you might be saying, oh, it is the King of England. What is he doing here? Why are you here? You say, I've come here.

Whatever he would have said. But you don't often see the King of England in the German parliament, do you? A little bit of a surprise. Is he a tourist? Why is Jesus here? So just hold that thought.

Then the second use of this as a population among the nations, the world, meaning a population among the nations. And if you just think about it, the Bible is mostly about God's dealings with one particular family, one particular human family, one people, Israel. And if you think about it, I know

most people sitting here know their Bibles pretty well. You think back in your Bible of the different nations that are mentioned, you know, England isn't mentioned in there, Wales isn't mentioned in there, but various other nations are mentioned in there. And mostly, in fact, I would say without exception, they're mentioned negatively. So if you'd come along here as a Philistine to learn English, welcome to you. You're very welcome here this morning. I have to say, if you'd gone back and been a Philistine, you wouldn't have been welcome. The Philistines were the enemies of God's people, weren't they? Or if you had been an Assyrian, well, if you've come as an [12:11] Assyrian to learn English, you're very welcome this morning. But if you'd been an Assyrian back in the day, you would have been an enemy, not welcome at all. And if you'd been an Amalekite, Amalekites, there's no such thing as a good Amalekite. They're perpetually enemies of God's people and, you know, not welcome. You think of the Romans in the time of Jesus. That's very interesting. How are they depicted? They're an occupying power and they're such similar to the Assyrians or the Babylonians. Not welcome. However, there were some Romans who believed in Jesus. There's a little interesting development there. And Jesus says, I tell you the truth, not in Israel, have I found such faith as this Roman soldier. And it's a Roman soldier at the end. You remember in Mark's gospel who says, when he saw how Jesus died, truly this man was the son of God. So there's a little bit of a sea change in the way the nations are perceived. And it is specifically Jesus who has an appeal across the nations and the ethnic groups. So he says in chapter 10, verse 16, I have other sheep that are not of this fold, meaning I have sheep, people that I'm going to take to heaven that are from other ethnic groups and other nations, the world, in other words. So the world is used to mean different nations. In chapter 12, verse 20, there seems to be a change in pace in the gospel, certainly in Jesus' perception of things where among those who went up to worship were some Greeks. And they come to Philip and they say, sir, we would like to see Jesus. And this triggers something in Jesus' mind because he says, the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

There's a new perspective to the world as seen as a population of different nations. And when in 1219, his opponents say, the whole world has gone after him, I think that's perhaps what they're meaning. It isn't just the Israelites, it's Greeks. And goodness knows, maybe Romans will start following him. And maybe people from the Indian subcontinent will start following him. And maybe Korean people will start following him because world stretches across the nations. And Jesus himself says, chapter 12, verse 32, if I've got that right, when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all, you have to put in a word there, all people, all men, all something, all to myself. And this idea that this is a new thing, that Jesus is for the world, meaning all sorts of different ethnic groups and population. And I say, why has he suddenly changed the parameters here? You know, what's happening to provoke this change? What's motivating? It's a big change from the way the Old Testament works, isn't it? How come so suddenly, so international? So number two, a population across the nations.

Number three, this is a little bit more sinister, a race in rebellion. Now then, I want to speak carefully, please hear me out on this. Here's the idea that one's breed or ethnicity is inextricably linked with certain characteristics. I know there's a wrong route to go down with this, but let's think of animals. So Labradors are a particular sort of breed of animal, breed of dog. I'm not a dog person, so you can correct me if I've got this wrong. But Labradors are known, aren't they, for their bouncy affection? Is that right, Labradors? They're affectionate animals. And retrievers, I display my ignorance because I can't give a proper name for this, but aren't they bred specifically to notice prey and go bouncing off and bring back the pheasant that you shot with Sir Rodney on the estate or whatever it is you've been doing? Isn't that what retrievers do? And a bloodhound? Isn't a bloodhound bred to detect odours and you say, I don't know, find the credit card that I dropped in Salt Dean and they go, you know, I've got that one. They detect odours and follow a trail that as a specialism. I'm just going to be careful with ethnic groups. Interestingly, Paul says about

Cretans that they are all liars. So he picks on a particular trait, as he describes it, of Cretans. I hope there's nobody here from Crete. It was back in those days anyway. But I'm now thinking of this particular species of humanity. The family of Adam, the breed of humanity, the race of humanity linked to Adam. And according to the Bible, and Jesus, should we say, emphasizes this or assumes this, there are certain characteristics of the family of Adam. Jesus distinguishes himself. Although he is human, he has different characteristics in this respect. And the characteristics are not pleasant.

[18:44] Jesus makes this sort of distinction in texts like this in 823, where he says to his listeners, you are from below. I am from above. You are of this world. I am not of this world. I told you you would die in your sins. Unless you believe I am here, you will die in your sins. And it's an interesting sort of assumption of what he's saying. I am from above, so I don't belong to your group in this particular way. You are from down here. And what characterizes you down here is sin.

So it isn't just that the world means a sort of international variety of cooking and language, but we're all part of this world. And this world is steeped in sin. And he says things like this.

He says this to his own family, doesn't he, in chapter 7, verse 7. The world cannot hate me. I'm sorry. The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify about it that its deeds are evil. It's a very shocking thing to say. But he's saying that this world now is meaning a race in rebellion. World in a negative sense. You are of this world.

I testify that your deeds are evil, says Jesus. And you hate me. And if you went to go back to 319, where you get the sort of moths and woodlouse effect, those who come to the light and those who go away from the light. Chapter 319, he says, this is the judgment. Light has come into the world. And the people love darkness rather than the light because their deeds are evil. For everyone who does evil hates the light and will not come to the light, lest his work should be exposed. This is an unpleasant truth about the world. It's the world seen as a race in sin and rebellion, a race organized against the Lord and his anointed.

It's a hard one, isn't it? It's the characteristic of moral evil. And in these verses, there are mentions of judgment, that it will be shown that the way this race in rebellion thinks and acts, when the light comes, it will be shown that this is dark and corrupt and just wrong. A race in rebellion, the use of the word world. And this race in rebellion is organized by an evil ruler.

[21:43] So another fascinating reference here, 1231, was Jesus thinking about the cross, saying, now is the judgment of this world. Now the ruler of this world will be cast out.

Another rather dissonant statement, isn't it? About our race. Now is judgment on this world, and the ruler of this world will be cast out. He's referring to Satan, the devil. He's saying that there is some real sense in which the system of this world, with its politics and its education and its culture and everything, is organized under a ruler to think that goodness is odd, and that sin is normal, to think that unbelief is common sense and faith is stupid, to think that Jesus is nobody in particular and at worst somebody that you can politely or violently get rid of, that that whole way of thinking deserves judgment and is under a wicked ruler who Jesus will cast out.

It's a sobering assessment by Jesus, isn't it? He doesn't say it sort of maliciously, but he says it realistically. And this has implications for huge numbers of our friends, family and fellow citizens to say that they need Jesus Christ because otherwise they are in the world without hope. And that makes them members of a race in rebellion. And without Christ, such people are in a twisted world under a ruler whose power is now undone.

And I guess if you're a Christian this morning, you will have come to this realization at one point or another. And in one form or another, you will have said, I realize that there's something wrong with me. A lot of people consider this normal, but in the sight of God, this is wrong.

And I need rescue. I'm all tangled up with sin and wickedness. And I need, you know, I hardly understand much of it myself, but I can see that it's there. And I need to be redeemed from a race in rebellion. And if you're not a Christian this morning, or if that seems a strange thought to you, I invite you to ponder, this is how Jesus saw it. And if you're thinking, well, I'm quite a good person really, and I don't need much in the way of redemption, I think you're out of step with the way Jesus sees you. And I invite you to talk to him about that and try and get into some sort of alignment with the way Jesus sees us. A race in rebellion, a race in darkness. I am the light of the world and he

steps down into a dark world. It's like an unlit street, our world. It's a world which is twisted characteristically towards evil, like a warped timber that you get from timber suppliers. And you get it home and you find it went like that. And there's a warpedness about our nature, which perhaps we don't realise, but it's there. And under the reign of an evil ruler, you know, if somebody came, knocked on your door and accused you of being a member of a mafia gang, you'd say, me? But there's a spiritual truth that without Christ, you are a member of an organisation which is designed to overthrow the king of kings. Prone to judgment, ripe for judgment, under judgment, like a drunk driver going along, sirens going behind, policeman pulls you over. Oh, were you doing the sirens to me? Yeah, because you're a drunk driver. People go through life like that and God is calling out and saying, you're wrong, you're wrong. Not me, you.

[26:31] Murderously hating Jesus and his apostles. In a number of occasions, Jesus says, the world has hated me. Now, I just say about this word hate, in the Bible, it doesn't always carry the emotional baggage that in English it does. It can simply mean reject. You know, no man can serve master, he will love one and hate the other. It doesn't really mean that you get really worked up about it, but you just, you have to choose between them. So, it can just mean reject, but here it is saying, the world, Jesus says, the world has rejected me. With one amount of emotion or another.

And some people did hate him with an emotional hatred, enough to kill him. They did, didn't they? And that's a terrifying insight into the human condition. If you send the king of kings and the light of the world into a society, it can provoke such a violent, unwarranted, hateful reaction.

And we mustn't think that the people who surrounded Jesus in those days were particular freaks. They were just human beings. And that's what human beings are like. And that's what all human beings are like, to one degree or another, given whatever opportunity they have. You know, nowadays, people don't murder Jesus. They just politely ignore him.

Have you ever been somewhere where people just ignore you? It's a very hurtful and demeaning thing, isn't it? You know, you walk in the room, you queue up at the counter, you know, you try and get served in the pub.

And that's what people do to God. It's a terrifying indictment of the human race.

[28:39] And I can say a few more things about the world. It has its own system of comfort and peace. In the chapter that we read in 1427, Jesus says, Peace I give you. Let me quote it exactly to you. Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you.

Not as the world gives, do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled. The world has a way of giving peace. Jesus acknowledges it. But I give peace in a different way, says Jesus. My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives, give I to you.

It has a way of giving peace. And people are experts in this. Things are offered to give people peace.

Pleasure is offered to give people peace. Power is offered to give people peace. I suppose sex is offered to give people peace. Self things are offered to give people peace. The whole earth is offered to give people peace. But Jesus gives peace. And we were thinking of Enid's death. And there is peace to be had considering the death of a believer. It isn't the peace that says, well, she had a good innings, which she did have a good innings. But it says there's much more to give us peace than that. It's to know the promises of Jesus Christ and the future that he has in his hands to bring his people to himself.

My peace I give you, says Jesus. Not as the world. The world has its own system. And I'm trying to paint an unpleasant picture of the world in this sense. Not just as a place and not simply as an international population, but as like a system. Quite unreasonably set against God.

[30:51] A place of darkness and all sorts of foul sin deep in the human makeup. And I ask the question, what would Jesus do with this rebellious system? What would he do with it?

If it were Philistines, you could look back and see what David would do with the Philistines. He would, you know, creep into their camp perhaps and try and kill as many of them as possible. Maybe, is that why Jesus came down? I think he came down to knock out this world, to give it its comeuppance.

It does say that Jesus overcomes the world. In this world, notice the word again, you will have tribulation, you will have trouble. But take heart, says Jesus, I've overcome the world. So what does he mean by that? Does he mean that he's going to come into this chaotic scene and just shovel the whole thing into a great big cosmic dustbin? Because I could imagine him doing that, couldn't you? I mean, wouldn't you say there would be good reasons to do that? Just shovel the whole thing up into the dustbin. Just like if you'd been sick on the floor and then you dropped all the plates and all the food had spilled off. What, you'd just shovel it all up, put it in the dustbin.

Is that what Jesus came to do? So let's come to item four, the world, the scene of a rescue operation.

[32:41] This verse seems to be, to my mind, as I stand here just now and as I thought about it last night, the most remarkable verse in the Bible.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God, listen to this, can you believe it? Did not send his son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him. Do you not think that's remarkable? He didn't come to condemn the world. He didn't just reject the world, he loved the world and he sent his son so that in some sense this huge cosmic mess might be saved.

It's a remarkable verse, isn't it? He did not come to condemn the world but to that the world through him could be saved. And Jesus looked on this mess and came from heaven and was sent by the father and commanded by the father to rescue and to save and to redeem and to forgive. I mean, isn't that amazing?

To rescue these poor people, to redeem, to pay, to buy back with great price, to save. Though even more than those medic workers in an earthquake or something, to save, to redeem, to forgive.

That's why he came. I think that's the most remarkable and wonderful thing. He comes to the scrap heap not to push it all into the dustbin but to rescue.

[34:45] You know, it's like somebody going into a cave full of growling wolves to say, I'm not going to shoot you all, I'm going to, at least some of you, I'm going to pluck out of there and you growling wolves will become affectionate pets. I'm going to just do something to win you through like that. And this is what he's done to the disciples. He said, you were of the world but you are not of the world any longer. Remarkable statement, we're pondering this. You are not of the world but I chose you out of the world.

There's various ways in which Jesus affects this sort of extrication. But one thing he says here is, my choosing was so powerful that when I chose you, it guaranteed that your racial affiliation will no longer be in Adam.

But the same as me, I've chosen you out of the world. You are not of the world. So, it's a region of creation, a population across the nations, a race and rebellion and a salvage operation for rescue. So, I won't take this very much further. But, have you heard a police siren coming up behind you and saying, you know, blue lights?

That's for you. That's saying, you need something. You are in the wrong. You need to get right. If you're in the world, you need to be rescued out of it.

[36:41] Have you turned from this Christlessness to abiding in Christ? Would you say, like Enid would have said, for me to live is Christ, to die is gain.

And unless you can say that, I don't want to give you any comfort whatsoever that you are a Christian. I don't want to give you any comfort whatsoever that you are a Christian, unless you can say, for me to live is Christ, to die is gain.

He's my saviour. I give my life to him. I need him and I need him every hour. Have you seen him lifted up?

As he would say, when I'm lifted up, I will draw all the world to me. All the whole world goes after him. Lifted up on the cross, that's what he means. Have you seen that as being absolutely wonderful and brilliant?

That it's the best thing in your life that Jesus died on the cross for you and rose again for you. Have you marvelled at the Father's mercy?

[37:51] That the Father in heaven himself could send his son and say, go and rescue people from that mess. I want you to do that.

I so love that world that I want to save people from it. Isn't that a most marvellous thing? Sending his son.

And I'll just say a little bit that the apostles who are on the receiving end of this, in this discourse at this meal, Jesus is going to say, I was sent into the world for you and I've saved you out of this world.

And I have and I've kept you. We'll think about that this evening. No doubt, I've kept you. Now, stage two. In the same way that the loving Father sent me so that I could redeem the world, I'm sending you.

And you will be hated and rejected. But you have still got to love. And there is a message from me which I give to you and which you can pass on by which people in this world will be saved.

[39:09] They're sent to save. And we are too. They will be rejected. As the Father sent me, so I have sent them into the world.

You also will bear witness because you've been with me from the beginning. The Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father will testify about me. You're going to testify, he says to the apostles, the Holy Spirit will testify.

And this movement of saving the world will continue the next stage through the apostles and through those who believe through the apostles' word.

That's us. And we're not on our own with this. The Holy Spirit will convict the world concerning sin, concerning righteousness, and concerning judgment. And as the apostles echoed the ministry of Jesus, so we echo the ministry of the apostles.

People are still coming to Christ because of the apostles' word. The apostles are not here to speak it, but we are. Let's stop there.

[40:16] Joy to the world. The Lord has come. We'll close with this song.