

Today - Preaching in the present tense

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Date: 03 January 2021

Preacher: John Woods

[0:00] Welcome members, friends and visitors to our morning service at Calvary Church on the 3rd of January 2021.

! Happy New Year! My name is Mark Rayfield for those who do not know me and I'll be leading the service this morning. Tonight at 6.30 David Rigglesworth will be leading us via Zoom as we take stock and reflect on last year and give thanks, as well as praying for this year. Please come with something to contribute, perhaps a song, scripture reading or testimony.

That would be great. For visitors, Calvary Church is a relatively small community of disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ in the multicultural city of Brighton and Hove, located on the south coast of England.

I hope and trust you'll be strengthened in your faith today as we start a new year together. And if you don't trust in Christ, you'll be impressed by today's message and service and want to be a follower of Christ.

If you'd like to contact the church, please go to our website and there you'll find the contact details. We have help in the pulpits again from John Woods, former pastor at Lansing Tabernacle Church, of whom we thank for taking the time and being willing to feed us from God's word.

[1:40] Thank you, John. We'll be studying in Luke's Gospel this morning, Jesus' first sermon. So please get a Bible to hand, ready to delve into the passage.

Our first song is Lords for the Years, written by Timothy Dudley Smith, about Christ's lordship over governments and nations.

As we have recently finished 2020 and move into another year, we can praise and thank the Lord for his love that has kept and guided us, despite the disappointments of our lives.

So let's sing together. Number 951 in praise, Lords for the Years. Lord for the Years, We bring our thanks today.

Lord for the Years, Christ in your people's praise.

[3:59] North for our land, In this a generation, Spirit's oppressed by pleasure, wealth and care.

For young and old, For commonwealth and nation, Lord of our land, be pleased to hear the prayer.

Lord, for our world, when we discern and doubt Him, loveless in strength and comfortless in pain, hungry and helpless, lost in need without fear, Lord of our world, we pray that Christ will reign.

Lord, for our sins, in living power, we make us step on the cross and Christ upon the throne.

Far's put behind us for a future take us, Lord of our lives, to live for Christ alone.

[5:44] Let's bow our heads and pray to Almighty God. Heavenly Father, we want to echo the words we have just sung.

We thank you for all the years you have kept us by your mighty outstretched arm, despite our proneness to let you down and let others down by our selfishness.

Lord, we thank you for your word, which speaks to our hearts and changes our foolish ways, encouraging us to look to you, pointing to the marvellous finished work of our Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Please help us listen to your message this morning through your servant, John. We thank you for Christ's finished work today as we stand only by his love and grace, which has come down from heaven and gripped our hearts and wills.

We come in confession of the things we have thought, said and done, which are not holy and honourable, and ask that you treat us compassionately and forgive us through Jesus Christ.

[7:05] We pray for the persecuted church in our world, especially for Christians in Nigeria who are being attacked by Islamists. Like the psalmist, we ask that those who are against you and your people, may you oppose and get rid of.

We pray for our land, which is certainly oppressed by pleasures, wealth and care.

We can only pray for a miracle, that you would reveal yourself powerfully in these dark days, where there is so much apathy to your message of forgiveness and hope.

We pray for the NHS, the National Health Service, which is under a lot of strain as I speak, as they try to care for those who are sick in our hospitals.

We thank you for the common grace, which gives people compassion for those who are ill. Please give help, strength, wisdom to all involved.

[8:18] We pray for our governments, who on the whole do not look to you, but may you still give them wisdom to rule intelligently and rightly for us as a nation.

We pray for those who are lonely and struggling at this time, that you'd be their comfort, especially those in our fellowship who are experiencing bereavement.

We praise you for your omnipotence. You are much bigger than our circumstances and that whatever we have on our hearts, you are more than able to take and deal with accordingly.

We do so now in the quietness of our hearts. We pray for those in need of employment and accommodation.

Please provide for them, we ask. We lift up our practical needs in our church for a new pastor, needs of new elders and deacons. Lord, as we go into another year not knowing what will happen, we know that we can trust you nonetheless.

[9:48] We are in your tender keeping as we have seen throughout our lives. We repeat the psalmist, how priceless is your unfailing love, both high and low among men find refuge in the shadow of your wings.

Lord, please hear our prayer. Amen. Our second song is All My Days, Beautiful Saviour by Stuart Townend.

Following on from the verse I quoted in Psalm 36, the psalmist goes on to say in verse 8 onwards, they feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights. For with you is the fountain of life. In your light do we see light. We have this lovely image of the Lord giving us refreshments, giving us drink from the river of his delights, being replenished and delighting in this.

May we drink from this river of delights this morning, brothers and sisters. May it be true for all of us that all of our days we will sing this song of gladness, give our praise to the fountain of delights, beautiful saviour, wonderful counsellor.

[11:17] Let's sing 724. All My Days. All My Days. Give my praise to the fountain of delights, for in my helplessness you heard my cry, a waste of mercy poured down on my life.

I will trust in the cross of Mary, a demon.

I will sing of the blood that never fails. All sins forgiven, of conscience clears, of death, defeated and life without end.

Beautiful saviour, wonderful counsellor, clothed in majesty, Lord of history, you're awake, the truth, the light, style of the morning, progress and holiness.

You're the risen one, heaven's champion, and you reign, you reign, oh God. I long to be where the praise is never ending, yearn to dwell where the glory never fades, where countless worshippers will share one song, and Christ all will be one of the land.

[13:56] Wonderful saviour, wonderful counsellor, Lord of majesty, Lord of history, you're the way, the truth, the life, style of the morning, glorious and holiness, you're the risen one, heaven's champion, and you reign, you reign, oh.

Let's read God's word together. So, please turn to Luke, chapter 2, verse 40 to 52.

I'll say that again. Luke, chapter 2, verse 40 to 52. After I have read, we will then listen to John Woods, who will be explaining it.

So, let's read God's word together. And the child grew and became strong.

He was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him. Every year, Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover.

[15:37] When he was 12 years old, he went up to the festival according to the custom. After the festival was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it.

Thinking he was in their company, they travelled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him.

After three days, they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them, and asking them questions.

Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were astonished.

His mother said to him, Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you. Why were you searching for me?

[16:56] He asked. Didn't you know I had to be in my father's house? But they did not understand what he was saying to them. He went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them.

But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and man.

May the Lord bless his word to us now as John comes to speak. Thank you for your welcome. Very pleased to be here on this first Sunday of a new year and I'd like to wish you all a happy new year. a year filled with hope. We trust that as we emerge into this year we would know God's hand upon us and that the challenges of this past year would turn into perhaps something of a more normal year in the year to come and that as we emerge into this year we would indeed be wiser and deeper people.

We're looking again today at Luke's Gospel and in our reading we looked at those words from Luke chapter 2 verses 40 to 52 In some ways it follows on what we were looking at last week when we thought about the shepherds returning from that life-changing visit of seeing Jesus in the manger wrapped in cloths as the angels had indicated they were never the same again because they had seen Jesus Jesus was the central figure of that story the central figure of Christmas and Jesus is the central figure of Luke's Gospel Luke has spoken to people who met Jesus who listened to his conversations who heard his teaching who were able to observe his life up close and personal and observe his amazing works and even be there in his last moments when he was upon the cross of course included amongst those eyewitnesses would have been Mary and I guess it was from

[19:34] Mary that this particular story came Jesus is the centre of all things for Luke and Luke wants us to see him understand him and trust him with a certainty that gives us hope hope for today and hope for tomorrow and hope for every day Jesus Christ the same yesterday today and forever a few years ago I read this question in a commentary an interesting question what was it like to be Jesus what was it like to be Jesus it's an interesting question particularly as we come to this particular passage because it's the only passage in the four gospels that gives us a story of

Jesus between the time of his birth and the time he emerged into his public ministry the age of 30 it's a unique insight into the adolescent Jesus what was it like to be Jesus what was it like to be a pre-teenager growing up in a carpenter's house what was it like to be a 12 year old in Nazareth a 12 year old visiting with his family and friends the Jerusalem temple at the time of the Jewish Passover what was it like what was it like to look through the eyes of Jesus at the world what was it like to look through the emotions and the stirrings of ambition that are in the heart of Jesus what was it like to be

Jesus the word that sums up this passage for me is the word tension and there is a measure of tension in the passage there is a tension between the ordinary and the extraordinary there are things which are normal and expected and there are things which are unexpected there are things which are ordinary and there are things that are extraordinary about what we read here Luke's glimpse of the childhood of Jesus is surprisingly reassuringly normal when Joseph and Mary lose

Jesus they assume he's just with the rest of the family he's playing with other children he is interacting with others although it's a crisis it's a crisis that's wrapped up with a normal sense that he's probably okay somewhere with someone there is the ordinary and there is the extraordinary he was doing what a normal 12 year old boy would do in Israel accompany his parents to Jerusalem for the

Passover and be involved in the occasion there's also the tension between what we assume and what we understand there is sometimes a need when we encounter Jesus to think about things differently because with Jesus things are never quite as they seem Mary and Joseph had the tension in their lives of knowing that Jesus had a back story that the events that we thought of last week the events of Bethlehem the events of the first Christmas marked Jesus out as someone who is very special indeed the special one the sent one quite clearly there is something about Jesus which is true of him and true of nobody else in the whole world and yet there's also something which is normal a normal human being a real human being about

Jesus what a tension it is in their minds and in their understandings to reflect upon someone who is both son of God and a human being we perhaps are familiar with those superhero stories like Superman where ordinary parents have to bring up a child with superpowers and the tension in terms of understanding that that brings to them well we kind of magnify it a million times when we think about Jesus and the tension that they would have had there is tension in their expectations the expectations of a normal Jewish father was that their son would take on the family business become a carpenter stroke builder and that that would be what they would do they would look after [25:27] Joseph and Mary in their old age and they would just continue the family tradition and pass that family tradition on to their son and their son in turn we all have our ideas about Jesus but there's something about Jesus which can be somewhat elusive sometimes unexpected that creeps up on us unawares someone has said every time we relax and think we've already understood him he will be up ahead or perhaps staying behind while we go on without thinking discipleship always involves the unexpected yes being someone who is involved with Jesus means being involved with someone who is normal normal normal human being yet the living

God who might act in unexpected ways and lead us along unexpected paths! emotionally and culturally Mary and Joseph find it very difficult to get their head around who Jesus actually is and why he has come it's just so interesting that Mary is thinking deeply about these things we were told that in chapter 2 verse 19 and we're told it again there in verse 50 that she is putting these memories concerning Jesus into a mental notebook and of course this is where Luke got this story from her memories her impressions but you get the impression that as they're writing these things down it's part of the process of them seeking to work them through what does that actually mean to give birth to Messiah what does it actually mean for the son of the most high to be part of your household what does it mean for the one who is

Emmanuel God with us to be part of your family group faith and understanding are not guaranteed even if we have close proximity to Jesus or the Bible or church just because our parents are Christians and they take us to church doesn't mean that we are necessarily closer to Jesus or it's easier for us to believe sometimes we can be so close so close that we can't really see what's straight in front of our face and we go to an art gallery and stand right up against a huge painting and you see a few squiggles of paint in front of your eyes you step back perhaps to the wall opposite and you take in the whole canvas and then suddenly you see the whole picture Mary and Joseph were very close to Jesus they saw him every day yet that did not mean that they fully understood exactly what he was about and exactly what that meant for them or for him the loss of a child is a nightmare think of the tension in the story surrounding this loss it's everyone's every parent's worst nightmare than if you've ever lost a child we lost one of our children temporarily in a shopping mall in Essex and it was a scramble I remember as a boy a small boy being lost in a rock factory that's the kind of rock that you eat the pink stuff rather than the rocks that you build a wall with and actually it was probably all things being equal a particularly nice place to be lost for a small boy I was comforted by some rather reassuring ladies who gave me some of their pink rock to enjoy whilst my mother was found of course this was a bit of a different situation here

Mary and Joseph had advanced some way almost a day from Jerusalem before they realised that Jesus was missing they had to come back the same length of time and then they had to search for him in Jerusalem you can imagine the kind of panic I don't know about you maybe sometimes if you're waiting for a child half an hour is okay after an hour you get particularly concerned goes beyond that and you begin to feel a measure of blind panic you may have seen the iconic films Home Alone 1 and Home Alone 2 which are about a family who on two particular Christmases fail to get up in time for the lift that's taken them to the airport to carry them away on holiday and this extended family 14 or 15 or so who are picked up in two minibuses manage on two particular Christmases to leave one of their children behind

[31:06] Kevin McAllister and the films tell us about what happened when he was left alone vulnerable in his own house and how he responds in the films Kevin is not missed until the families reach their destination and then there is the panic tension of knowing how they're going to get back home it's Christmas after all and the flights are limited how can they get back to make sure that their child is safe it's a dilemma it's a tension that we feel in this Luke's attention in this story is placed on the anxiety of Mary and Joseph but also upon the amazing picture of Jesus in the temple talking with the teachers of law and holding his own in asking and answering questions they're filled with blind panic he is involved in being absorbed in what

God's word says and teaches so there is this tension also within family loyalty the tension between the loyalty that Jesus has to his earthly parents Mary and Joseph biological mother adopted father and his loyalty the growing sense of loyalty he senses towards God verse 49 when Jesus is finally found and Mary says you know you realise it would be you know out of mind of worry why were you searching for me Jesus says in verse 49 didn't you know that I had to be in my father's house I must be in my father's house or in my father's things or about my father's business didn't you know that Jesus hadn't intended to dishonour or disress his parents in fact verse 51 tells us that when he returns to Nazareth he was obedient to Mary and Joseph and the indication is that that was the normal course of events yet this incident reminds us of the complexity of these relationships Mary Joseph and God Mary and Joseph have to radically rethink who Jesus' father actually is who is the person who is shaping the identity of Jesus who is making him the person that he is and will become his destiny is not to be a carpenter following in the footsteps of

Joseph his destiny is to be the sent one of father God the sent one the one who has been sent to be a saviour to die upon the cross not to work with wood but to die on wood that's the destiny of the Lord Jesus Christ it was expected of him that he would follow the family business but what was expected of him what was the must in his internal experience his growing internal experience was that he must that's the word he must verse 41 be about his father's business be involved in his father's things not the carpenter shop in Nazareth but the road that would lead to the cross of calvary and death for sinners

I must be about my father's business now for many people this seemed like a foolish path a path that was suicidal but as we'll see Jesus was not foolish he was wise and the path he was taking was the path that the father had marked out for him this was the father's business it seemed like a foolish path because it led to a cross where he is visibly abandoned by man and abandoned by God and yet in what seemed like foolishness we see the loving wisdom of

[36:43] God to reach people like you and me through sacrifice this snapshot of Jesus concludes with words that describe the development of Jesus Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and men Jesus progressed there was measurable progress in his life you could chart his development now interestingly in chapter two there are three words that are used to describe Jesus verse 16 he's described as a baby in verse 40 he's described as a young child and here in verse 52 he's described as an older child he has had the normal human development he has grown from baby to child to adolescent and he will develop into a man

Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and men the commentator Leon Morris said of each stage he was perfect for that stage but the perfection of a child is inferior to the perfection of a man it is the difference between perfect innocence and perfect holiness Jesus

developed like a seed develops into a plant or a bulb develops into a flower at each stage they are perfect for that particular stage a seed is not inferior to a plant it's just different and Jesus grew and developed into true manhood he developed in wisdom he grew in wisdom verse 40 also tells us that Jesus as he develops develops in wisdom and now you may have heard parents say to their children you haven't got the sense that you were born with and the frustration of a parent looking on at a child who has done something really stupid you haven't got the sense you were born with and of course some people are like that and although it can be something that we overlook occasionally in a child it's really sad when it happens in the life of a man who was 30 40 or 50 you haven't got the sense you were born with we're supposed to grow we're supposed to develop and Jesus did develop one of my favourite books is the book of Proverbs chapter 4 verse 7 it says the beginning of wisdom is this get wisdom though it cost you all you have get understanding wisdom is a vital component for life it's something that's worth investing our time and energy in get wiser I asked last week as a result of coming to see who Jesus is are we wiser and deeper having gone through the last year and the strangeness and the complication of Covid time are we wiser and deeper have we grown as a result of our experiences one of things I pray for when people are going through challenging circumstances is that in some way God will use these circumstances to draw people closer to himself and to draw people who don't know him to Jesus so vital isn't it to learn how to grow we live don't we in an age where the answer to everything seems to be to google it what would google do google google can give us knowledge but it doesn't give us wisdom if you say to your mobile phone siri what's the meaning of life they might give you the answer 42 from the sci-fi novel but they'll not be able to give you an answer that really makes any sense of life or if you turn to your electronic assistant

Alexa ding what's the meaning of life I'm sorry I don't understand that question Jesus grew in wisdom now when he comes to being tempted in Luke chapter 4 the tests that are given to him by the devil are met with the words it is written and on each occasion as he says it is written he quotes from Deuteronomy Jesus had grown in wisdom he'd learnt He'd learnt how to use scripture as is indicated by this question and answer time with the leaders in the temple he had grown in the ability not only to gain information but to use information wisely there's a mystery in this that [42:37] Jesus in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge has to grow in wisdom he is a real human being who submits himself to the processes of maturing in order that he might identify with us everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers now we mustn't get the impression that Jesus was some kind of know it all that can be really annoying can't it know it all no Jesus had a naturalness about his wisdom that was endearing and attractive it's interesting isn't it that the words of Luke chapter 2 verse 52 are almost an exact quotation from 1 Samuel chapter 2 26 the description of the development of

Samuel Samuel the boy in the temple the boy in the temple who hears God and has a message for the tone deaf leader of Israel's worship at that time Samuel hears God and astounds Eli with the message Jesus has grown in wisdom so he can astound the leaders in the temple a nation that had grown to be tone deaf towards God suddenly was hearing wisdom from someone whose ear was open ever open to what God the father had to say to him how long will you delay to be wise that was a question asked in a book a secular book about wisdom how long will you delay to be wise sometimes we can be so stubborn we don't learn lessons we don't respond we just carry on in our own way are you making progress in wisdom however you measure it as you reflect on the past year are you a wiser and deeper person and Jesus grew in stature he grew physically taller and it's interesting that

C.S. Lewis makes the comment that Christianity alone amongst world religions is unashamedly a religion that affirms the importance of the human body the human body is something which is part of God's good creation that's why we believe in the resurrection of course we believe in the resurrection on the final day the resurrection of the body because we believe that the body is good it's part of God's good gift to us God made us human beings with a body God loves physical matter and part of his plan is to have a renewed heaven and earth the home of righteousness to redeem not only our spiritual our soul but to redeem our body

Jesus grew in stature he had a normal physical development and he grew spiritually he grew in favour with God and there's that interesting phrase in verse 40 that the grace of God was upon him because the grace of God to Jesus did not need to be experienced like we experience it as those who are sinners who don't deserve God's grace the grace of the Father experienced by the Lord Jesus was a grace that was experienced without any resistance without any barriers it was grace the favour of Father God to him when Jesus was baptised the heavens opened and the Holy Spirit came in the form of a dove and the words from heaven were this is my son whom I love in whom I am well pleased this is the grace of the delight of

God the smiling face of God upon his eternal son he grew in favour with God this was his key mission I must be about my father's business his will his pleasure is my delight taste and see that the Lord is good psalmist says delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart if you want to be a man or a woman or a child experiencing God's favour well then delight yourself in God his wisdom and his word his will in your life and Jesus grew in favour with people [48:24] Jesus was a real human being and he had contact with real human beings and Jesus was involved in normal relationships with his fellow human beings we've seen how he was assumed to be simply with the rest of the family and their children when he was lost and Jesus experienced normal human relationships the gospel is good news for all people that's what we read in Luke chapter 2 verse 11 you see this last phrase of Luke chapter 2 reminds us of exactly why Jesus has come for people he has come to save people there is nothing

Christian about being anti social there is nothing Christian about being isolated and distant from people the great tragedy of human experience in the last year one of the great tragedies is social distance not being able to meet not being able to be close Jesus has come close to us Jesus is Emmanuel God with us the good news!

God has come close one of the lovely things about the gospel is how Jesus will touch the vulnerable person will touch the leper who will lift up those who are broken who will come to those who are socially excluded and he will embrace them he'll say to another person dying upon the cross today you'll be with me in paradise Jesus loves people what a wonderful thing that is remember what Paul said to the Galatian Christians I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me Jesus came he lived he grew in order that he might be for people like you and me a saviour to connect us to

God why not make 2021 the year when you come to know wisdom by coming to know Jesus let's pray together father god we would pray for caravoo church this year we pray that the church and each member of it will make progress becoming wiser deeper and more fruitful nearer to you and more effective in reaching out to people may the knowledge of your glory fill the earth as the waters cover the sea your kingdom come your will be done on earth as it is in heaven help me oh father to grow up into christ after the pattern he set for me treating my body with respect so that it can be strong in your service developing my mind so that it can be wise in your ways but most of all responding to your grace in christ so that i may experience your favour in all i do god be in my head and in my understanding god be in my eyes and in my looking god be in my mouth and in my speaking god be in my heart and in my thinking god be at my end and at my departing we ask this in jesus name amen thank you john for your message this morning and we're going to end with our last song there is a higher throne by the gettys a

Thank you.

[53:27] There is a higher throne that all this world has known, where faithful ones from every town will one day come.

Before the sun will stand, make basklets through the land.

Believing hearts find promised grace. Salvation comes.

Hear heaven's voices sing. Their thunderous anthem rings.

Through emerald courts and sapphire skies. Their praises rise.

[54:43] Oh, glory, wisdom, love. Strength, thanks, and honor unto God, our King.

Who reigns on high forevermore. And there we'll find our home.

Our life before the throne will honor Him in perfect song.

Where we belong. He'll wipe His tears, stained eye.

As thirst and hunger die, the Lamb becomes our shepherd King.

[55:56] We'll reign with Him. Hear heaven's voices sing.

Their thunderous anthem rings. Through emerald courts and sapphire skies.

Their praise, their praise, their praise, their praise, their praise, their praise. O glory, wisdom, power.

Strength, thanks, and honor unto God, our King. Who reigns on high forevermore.