

# A Christmas message

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[0:00] And on this matter of good news, the angel says it's good news of great joy, a saviour who! is Christ the Lord. And I want to just to think for a minute or two about is it good news? Good! News? Human beings and good news. We have a bit of an uneasy relationship with good news, don't we? We have somebody staying with us who's been doing interviews for jobs and hopes get built up. Will I have that job? It's such a nice job. It's going to provide security and fulfillment.

But the answer comes back, no, giving that job to somebody else. And that hope that it will be good news. No, not this time. And every disappointment makes it a little bit harder to hope, doesn't it? A little less easy to believe that it will actually be okay. And I guess human race as a whole has an issue with believing good news. I mean, I'm sure there are people somewhere who think that Martians will come and rescue the human race. Well, I mean, only crazy people would believe that sort of thing, wouldn't they? Or who believe that Mother Earth will restore the Garden of Eden. I don't know, I feel that quite hard to believe. And it's very tempting to put the Christmas story, the baby born a long time ago, to put that into the same category as a nice idea, but actually impossible. Impossible to believe that that's good news. But the angel did say it was good news. And angels are, well, not all of them, but the angels of the Lord are remarkably truthful creatures and wouldn't say that if it were not true.

So for a moment, I'd just like us to open our minds to the possibility that the angel was right, that this is good news. I've got a click. Good news. Because sometimes the answer to the interview can be, yes, you can have this job and it's a great job. And sometimes the diagnosis comes back from the doctor, you don't have cancer. You don't have cancer. You will be okay. You can live a normal life. Everything will be good. And just thinking about what the angel said, good news, let's just play with the possibilities that the angel was right. What sort of good news would it be? It would be good news saying that God has not left us alone. Yep. Tyrants seem to go unopposed. Lies seem to run around the world before truth has got its shoes on. Is that the quotation? Greed and power do seem to oppress.

Wars go on. The poor get trampled. I mean, this is not new, is it? But here's something. In the midst of all that, God sent Jesus. It shows that God has not left us all alone.

[3:39] He does care. He is not absent. He is not distant. He is not aloof. But if what the angel says is right, he has stepped into the world and into our human situation with all its mess and unfairness and oppression and all of that, God has not left us alone. That strikes me as remarkably good news.

Secondly, God has not decided to cut his losses. God has not decided to cut his losses. He has not left us alone. He has not left us alone. Now, I think nobody could look around the world and say, oh, everything's fine. The world has got beauty in it, but it's also got deep, deep trouble.

There is selfishness, greed, and there is something called evil, and it really exists. And that's what human beings have done in this world.

If you're a painter and the painting had got all skew-whiff and wrong, you would be tempted to throw the canvas away and start again. If you're making toast and the toast gets burnt all around the edges, it's a little bit of a toss-up, isn't it? Shall I scrape the burnt bits off the edge or shall I throw it away and start all over again?

And what does God think about our human race? It's certainly worse than burnt around the edges. But if the coming of the Savior, Jesus, is true, God has not decided to cut his losses and give up.

[5:32] He's actually decided to get very intimately involved with the human race. I don't know what your tactics are for redeeming burnt toast, whether you even do that, but God has certainly decided to do something to redeem the human race.

And I can hardly think of a deeper commitment from the God who made the world than to actually come down into the world, to come down not just giving a book, whichever holy book you're thinking of, not just giving ten words or ten commandments, but actually himself personally stepping down. That seems to me to speak of the most personal commitment to putting things right. He's not decided to cut his losses, and that seems to me to be remarkably good news.

And the third thing which strikes me as remarkably good is that God has a plan to change the world, and I put from the inside.

And I'll try and explain what I mean by that. It's not particularly obvious, I think, from the Christmas story as such. It's sort of hinted at. But let's just follow this thought.

[6:51] It's a story of God fulfilling his plan by giving a baby to an unmarried girl in a culture where that would be very shameful in a little town far away, somewhat obscure, a town called Bethlehem, House of Bread.

That says something about the way God operates, doesn't it? It says something about the way his plan is working. You'll notice that Caesar Augustus was mentioned in the account, but the baby wasn't given to Caesar.

Jesus wasn't born in a palace. He wasn't born to an aristocratic family where he would inherit wealth and influence.

Politics is a good thing, but it's limited. It can't solve every problem. I mean, we pray for our politicians, but politics can only touch the outside.

But Jesus seems to me is on a mission to change the inside of people. When he grew up, he said to a man who was outwardly religious, you must be born again.

[8:09] That's something right on the inside. And that seems to me sort of a much deeper way of redeeming the world, perhaps a little bit longer and a bit more subtle.

But here is the way that God operated. And you notice that when the child was born, there wasn't a lot of outward show, was there?

I mean, there were the angels, but there wasn't a big sort of explosion. There's a certain subtlety and humility to the way that God operates in Jesus.

Jesus is unmistakably Yahweh, the God of the Hebrew Scriptures, but not in a show-off way. In a humble way.

You know, when he fed 5,000, he didn't do it with fireworks and with a big noise. He just fed people. And people had to sit and, what is going on there?

[9:06] What's the implications of it? This seems to me to be the genius of Jesus. He does not lack power and authority. But there is this unmistakable, most attractive humility.

If we follow on from what happened to Jesus when he grew up, which, of course, we don't... It'd be a mistake to get stuck on the Christmas story, wouldn't it?

Because the Christmas story is just the beginning. What happened to Jesus when he grew up? He walked around in that country, something like the size of Wales, is it?

Met a limited number of people. Engaged with the religious tradition of his heritage. And that religious tradition managed to come to the conclusion, we have a law.

And by this law, this man deserves to die. Not only did he come as a human, but he experienced all the downside, all the complexity of death and sin and paid the human price as he died on the cross.

[10:23] And that seems just a remarkable way of solving the world's problems. In a later letter, the Apostle Paul says, it looks stupid, doesn't it?

Who would think of trying to save the world by, if I put it this way very crudely, a dead Jew on a cross? But God has decided to do it that way. And he says that the foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of men and the weakness of God is more powerful than the strength of men.

So, three things for you to think about or three thoughts that I had which might be helpful. I think Christmas is good news in a remarkably radical way.

Despite all the mess up that human beings make, God has not left us alone. Despite all the mess that human beings have decided to make, God has not decided to cut his losses, but has entered in to save and redeem.

And the way he does this is not by imposing something from the outside, but as he worked in the womb of Mary, to do something from the inside.

[11:36] That's good news. And it seems to me that it carries with us an invitation that we can be part of that. And I invite you to see if you can take that further.

And we've got some programs next year that you might like to be involved with. But it's an invitation from God. Don't just leave it at that. Take it further. It's good news.

Let's close by singing this song. Hark the herald angels. Sing glory to the...