

Sharing Good News

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- [0 : 0 0] I get a great passage, as always. I get a passage that's the third part of an actual whole passage, which Russ started for us last week, and the middle bit which we skipped, although it is a very important bit of this entire passage.
- So I want you to think, this is our passage, but I want you to think a little bit back to what Russ said, where Russ told us about the hope of salvation we have in Jesus.
- That one day we will see the promises of Isaiah 40 fulfilled, and its outworkings as written by John in Revelation 21, come to pass, fully done, finished, no more tears, no injustice, no pain.
- Old order of things has passed away, the new has come. You know, that was what Russ told us last week. We heard that this declared coming by John, in his high-vis jacket, has actually come in Jesus, the Messiah.
- We were reminded that those who follow Jesus are those who are the citizens of the kingdom of God, and will enjoy the fruits of that kingdom, partly now, but one day forever.
- [1 : 1 0] And then we skipped the passage, to which all those excited people that got inspired by those words of John, were told actually to leave behind corruption.
- The prayers were spot on this morning. Injustice. John specifically pulls out certain people and their jobs, and the way that they were being unjust in the way they did life.
- And then we get our passage. So think about that. You just heard John say a load of quite heavy stuff to people about completely turning their lives around if they truly get this message.
- And the people were filled with expectation. Sounds a little bit different in that context. Expecting what? What's John going to say next?
- Uh-oh, is John going to call my career out? What was that expectation? Is John going to... Did John see me do that last week? And he's going to start picking on me as well.
- [2 : 1 2] What did that expectation look like? But one thing we know is they got this message, was a message of good news.
- It was a message of the good news that the Messiah they'd been waiting for had come. But it wasn't a rosy message.
- I actually wonder if John was a little bit surprised with the amount of people that followed him into the desert. Maybe they got the wrong memo. Because they turned up to see this man, you know, in his camel head, eating locust and honey, and probably didn't have his straighteners, and just looking a bit rough.
- Telling them this message of repentance. Because this good news message that John preached, this promise of salvation, was also a warning that the one coming means business.
- And this business is administering God's judgment on the state of the world and the creatures and empires that distort it. I like to think of John as a little bit like Brian.

[3 : 32] I don't know if you recognise this. The Life of Brian. It's a film that actually predates me, but it's still good. It's a really good film. Sorry, if you remember watching that in your 30s, I'm very sorry.

Anyway, I was going to show a couple of scenes from it, actually, but then every time I was like, that's the perfect scene, the watershed moment clocked in. I was like, ah!

There's always something in the film that makes it inappropriate for church. But if you, in your own judgment and discernment, go home and watch Life of Brian, if you're old enough, etc., etc. And you remember some of those scenes where he's just this normal guy, and he's got some good things to say, but generally, people keep just following him.

And I feel like John was a little bit like that. Because John gets mistaken for the Messiah. No matter what he says, people keep following him. He repeatedly told them he was not the Messiah.

You can think with Brian, it's the same issue. He keeps saying, I'm not the Messiah. And they're like, yeah, that's exactly the sort of thing the Messiah would say. And I know, because I've followed a few.

[4 : 41] And there's another scene, and I love about it, where he's in trouble for something. There's a watershed moment. And his mum comes into his house.

And there's a crowd of people waiting outside his door. And she goes, what's going on out there? And he goes, I don't know, mum. They're following me around. I don't know what to do. And they go, Messiah, Messiah.

And she opens the door. He's not the Messiah. He's a very naughty boy. I feel like John needed his mum in the desert just to help him out a little bit. Because these people were hearing the words of John and hearing good news.

But they were also hearing some tough stuff. And yet they didn't want to leave. So there was weight and honesty and integrity in these words that he was saying. It wasn't fluffy.

It was real. John's message proclaimed that the coming of the Messiah meant getting your house in order. It meant repenting of your role in the brokenness of the world.

[5 : 42] Preparing through the symbolic image of cleansing through the waters of baptism for the real judgment of God. Surely this isn't that good news.

For repentance means to change. It means to stop and turn around. It means to live a godly life. Repentance means to be involved in the judgment process.

Looking at yourself and being honest about the things in your life that do not reflect the life of Christ. And often we wait till Easter to remind people that baby Jesus became the man who carried out the judgment of God for the sin that infested and still distorts creation.

But for John, this was Jesus' primary purpose. He believed that when the Messiah made himself known, that civilization as they knew it would be fundamentally changed.

The empires would be toppled. God's people would be renewed again. And so his call to repent and be baptized was about preparation for that moment when the threshing floor would be cleared and only the weak, the repentant, the willing to be changed would survive.

[7 : 09] I know what you're thinking. Come on Jay, it's Christmas. It's not quite the jolly Christmas message you'd expect two weeks before Christmas. What's with the Debbie Downer?

If you don't know who Debbie Downer is, I am Debbie Downer today. Debbie Downer could be in the most amazing Walt Disney show, everything's beautiful and flashy, and she'd go, well, you know, but I wonder if they really did do enough health and safety checks.

Somebody could bring the biggest present out and be like, this is going to make your day amazing. And she'd go, yeah, well, but is that paper recyclable? And I just want to throw it out there.

You might feel like this about me today. Oh, he's being a bit like Debbie. I'm sorry. And I am. But like, but like, but like, John, for me, the Messiah's coming is a full gospel.

And it is actually good news. It's not just we wait for the future to come. It's not just we wait till the end. It means now. The good news for Christians that we celebrate at Christmas the incarnation.

[8 : 28] We celebrate the arrival of salvation physically on earth. No longer does humanity have to wait. The new way of life has come.

God has arrived and changed the trajectory of all creation away from darkness and back to its creator. We are not in the waiting room.

The kingdom of God is now and not yet, but we forget the now bit too often. And Christmas is that time where we see how serious God is about it.

In a baby, vulnerable, in a manger, God fleshed out on earth. For the salvation of mankind and all creation.

For me, that's the message that would drag me into the desert to see a guy wearing some funny clothes and eating honey and locusts. I don't want us to miss the significance of that message.

[9 : 28] We don't have to live the corrupt narrative anymore. Because God is making all things new right now. And his people are of the new creation in Christ.

We are called to actively seek his kingdom, life in our own. This is the proclamation of the good news. And this message still needs to be heard today.

And maybe even still proclaimed by me and you. It's heavy, but it's freeing. The burden is light.

So let me finish. I have a question. This Advent season, as we symbolically prepare, being filled again with the expectation that like those followers of John had, that like millions of people have had since the incarnation, for the coming Messiah.

Will you keep this season to mince pies and carol services, amazing and great as they are, come tonight, it's going to be awesome. Or will you heed John's message?

[10 : 45] Will you heed the message of truly, fully, good news? And search your heart and choose again, or maybe for the first time, to turn towards Jesus and accept his love, to repent and welcome the power of his refining, transforming spirit into your life.

because it is for the latter that the Messiah came. So let me ask you one more time.

Today, as you embrace this season of Advent, will you choose afresh, or maybe for the first time, to accept the love of Jesus and welcome in his transforming spirit into your life?

Amen.