

He Really is the Savior of the World

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Date: 23 April 2006

Preacher: Rev. George Sinclair

[0 : 00] On the Saturday night before Easter, I discovered that my seven-year-old boy believes in the Easter bunny. I was really surprised. I also discovered that he believes in Santa Claus.

Like, we've never been a big... I mean, we have lots of older brothers and sisters. I just assumed that whatever early belief he had in the Easter bunny and Santa Claus had been long debunked by somebody or another.

But it was so cute. It was on the Saturday night just before Easter morning. And my son and I were in the bedroom and he was getting ready for bed. And he asked me a question about how the Easter bunny got from house to house.

And then that's when I discovered he still believes in the Easter bunny. And then he sort of connected the Easter bunny to Santa Claus. And that's when I discovered he still believed in Santa Claus. And I didn't disabuse him. I don't know what you folks would do, those of you who are parents.

I just thought it was so adorable. I was fine with him believing that. And he'll come gradually to some other type of a sense. But what I'd like to share with you this morning is that Jesus isn't like Santa Claus or the Easter bunny.

[1 : 13] On one level, I guess there's a bit of a similarity because, you know, the wonderful thing about those two imaginary creatures is that there's something wonderful and magical about them and they give gifts.

And in that sense, I guess Jesus is like the Easter bunny and Santa Claus. But Jesus is not like either of them because Jesus is real. And he really lived and he really died.

And he really did rise from the dead. And he really is present amongst us this morning. He really is the savior of the world. And he will really return someday to judge the living and the dead.

The gospel is the good news, the story about a man named Jesus. The gospel is the good news, a story about a man named Jesus.

You know, at some point in time, every child will ask this type of question. At least every child who has Christian parents, maybe Muslim children, ask this question as well.

[2 : 16] But they'll ask the question, who made God? Every child asks that question. And my children have at their different times asked that question, who made God?

And I know you can always see when I try to answer them, and I probably don't give them good answers. I probably give complicated answers rather than simple answers. I say, well, nobody made God, you know.

I mean, if you think about it, there always has to be something that was first. There has to be something that was first. And Christians believe that the first thing wasn't just energy, or it wasn't just matter, or it wasn't just the world, but that the very first thing and the only thing which has always existed, that that's God.

That's what we believe is true. And depending on the age of the kid, you'll have maybe a bit of a longer talk about it. And of course, as some of you know who are university students, that same type of question comes up in university courses in terms of what is first?

What is that thing which existed before anything else existed? It's the very, in a sense, ground of existence. What is that thing? You know, the thing which is so amazing about the gospel story, at least the gospel story as John tells it, is John begins his story of Jesus by talking about that, who made God.

[3 : 37] He, you know, all of the other gospel writers begin maybe with a prophecy or John the Baptist or something, but the apostle John, when he begins to tell us the story about who Jesus is, the story of the good news about a man named Jesus.

And when John is going to tell us the good news about a man named Jesus, he begins by talking about this question, what came first? Who made God? And John's answer is very, very clear, that God is the first and biggest and greatest and most constant of all things.

And the beginning of the story of Jesus begins with the beginning of all things. John says that there is no time that God, the Son of God, was not.

There is no time when God, the Son of God, was not. And one of the wonderful things about this is that, you know, we live in an age and a culture where there's an increasing appreciation for the created order and the wonder of nature and there's concern about global warming and the environment and all of that type of thing.

And one of the wonderful things is that for our age, when John begins the story of Jesus by going with the very, very beginning of the beginning of the beginning of the beginning of the beginning, one of the things he's saying to us is this.

[5 : 00] You know, the very, very same being who created all things is the same being who is going to come to redeem us. It's not as if you have to choose between creation and redemption.

It's not as if you have to choose between the past and the future. But there is one God who is beginning and before all things. And if you want to understand the story of Jesus, you have to go right to the beginning.

Listen to how John puts it. If you want to use the Pew Bibles to follow along, it's on page 918. It's John chapter 1. And here's how John begins to tell the story of Jesus.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him nothing was made that was made.

In him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. You know, when you read this, and you sound this, it actually sounds like something you could read in Hinduism.

[6 : 12] It sounds like something you could find in the Upanishads, or something that Buddha would teach. It sounds like it's all going to be a story about abstractions and ideas. And so, I mean, the question could be, is the story about Jesus really a story about ideas or principles?

Is it about sort of just really abstract, high, eternal things, which maybe if we perfect ourselves through mystical states, through profound learning, through ascetic practices, if we perfect ourselves to the pinnacle of human effort and achievement, will we be able to grasp these abstract ideas?

Is the story about Jesus a story about high abstractions? John answers, no. It's not about high abstractions or principles at all.

That it's going to be a story that takes place in history. It's not about principles. It's not fundamentally about morals. It's not fundamentally about ideas.

Some of you might have heard this. It's my favorite joke about Anglicans. Some people might wonder, you know, I know a lot of you aren't, I was telling somebody the other day that most of the people who come to this service haven't grown up Anglican.

[7 : 31] They were really surprised. So maybe over coffee today, you can sort of share with each other, you know, what your spiritual journeys have been. But if you want to try to figure out where Anglicans fit in the Protestant scheme of things, it's very easy.

The Salvation Army picks you up out of the gutter. Baptists baptize you. Presbyterians educate you. Methodists disciple you.

Pentecostals teach you how to sing. Anglicans introduce you to society and culture. And then the Salvation Army picks you up out of the gutter. Now, you see, that's sort of a joke, putting down Anglicans or saying some bad, you know, there's one aspect of Anglicanism which is always a bit ambivalent, and that's, you know, our relationship to high culture and everything.

But, you know, if I want to try to tell you something about what Anglicanism was like, I could think maybe I could use this joke or maybe I could use this story, I could use this type of analogy. And, you know, and through the week sometimes if I want to try to communicate a particular idea, I'll be thinking through what type of story or analogy can I use.

And if Christianity is all about some abstraction or ideal or principle or practice or moral, then if that's what the Christian faith is all about, then what that means is that we human beings will try to think of some different stories or analogies that can try to communicate that abstraction.

[9 : 06] And then, as I said, maybe, you know, it's a matter of learning how to, you know, do, you know, mental disciplines and physical disciplines and dietary disciplines, etc., so that we can perfect ourselves to grasp these high abstractions and ideas.

But the Christian faith is not like that at all. The gospel is the good news, the story about a man named Jesus. And so after John has given these spectacular sort of abstract ideas of the Word and there's never a time when the Word didn't exist and the Word was with God and there's these wonderful, wonderful high ideas, the very, very next thing that John says as he continues to try to tell us the story about Jesus is he tells us about a man named John.

And he instantly goes from these high abstractions to history. A guy that, in a sense, if you'd been there with John, the disciple John, when he's talking about John the Baptist, you could have said to John the Evangelist, what was John the Baptist's favorite food?

And John could have said, well, he actually liked grasshoppers and honey. And we'd all go, oh, gross. At least I would go gross. Maybe some of you folks like that type of food. And so the Gospel is not a story about ideas or about principles.

It's going to be about something that God does in history. Listen to how John talks about it in verse 6. There was a man sent from God whose name was John.

[10 : 33] This man came to be a witness, to bear witness of the light that all through him might believe. He was not that light, but was sent to bear witness of that light.

Now, another question we could ask about the fact that the Gospel is the good news about a man named Jesus is that maybe this is going to be a story about how disciples and all and other people figured things out.

Maybe it's a story about figuring things out and achieving things. Maybe the image that we should have in our mind as we listen to this story and try to figure out what the Christian faith is, maybe we should think of something like a young child.

I don't know, those of you who've had young children or maybe had younger brothers and sisters, there's that time when a child, you're trying to explain a concept or an idea or something to them, and you can see the child just thinking and thinking and thinking.

You can see the look and concentration in their face, and you can see that wonderful moment, which almost as if a little light bulb went on in their head, and they get it. And if you've ever been there, when you've seen a young child get something, it's a really precious thing.

[11 : 46] You realize that just something was turned on in their head. And so maybe is the story, is this story which John is going to tell us about Jesus, about him dying on the cross and all of these things, is it really ultimately a story about human beings figuring things out and coming to new realizations.

And John is going to say to us, know that the image that we should have in our head is not of a child figuring something out, but that the image is, okay, you know what the image is like?

The image is really one of darkness and human powerlessness. That to hear the story of Jesus, not think of ourselves as little children figuring things out, but to recognize our complete and utter need for help.

I've used this example before, but I'll just ask you all folks here for a second. Okay. What am I thinking of in my head right now?

Not a single one of you have the vaguest idea in the world. I can tell you what I was thinking. I was thinking of the very first time I saw Tosh after he'd been born in Louise's arms.

[12 : 59] That's what I was thinking of in my head. Not a single one of you could possibly have known that. And what John is going to say is that the story about Jesus is a story of revelation.

It's a story of God making clear what had to happen and the life that had to be received because we human beings could not possibly know it or understand it or figure it out or work it out or achieve it by our own power.

That the way that we are going to have to hear this story about Jesus is just as if, if we want to know what's going on in God's head, if we want to know what on earth is going on in God's heart, we literally have to wait until he tells us.

And be open to receiving it. And that this is going to be a key dynamic as John tells us the story about Jesus. John is going to tell us that the world is in darkness.

And you know what? If you have, you can get all the darkness in the world together and darkness can never make light. Darkness can never make light. Light is something different from darkness

that shines in darkness.

[14:07] But if you have a dark room, that dark room will never produce light by itself. And John is going to say that the gospel is the good news about a man named Jesus. It's a story about revelation.

Listen to what he says. Verse 9. That was the true light, which gives light to every man who comes into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, and the world did not know him.

He came to his own, and his own did not receive him. But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name, who are born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

Maybe the story that we're going to hear about Jesus over the coming weeks is a story about the divine, the exalted, the sublime.

Maybe it's like an experience. You know how, we've all had those experiences of the divine and the sublime. Maybe it's been after a really good day, we've maybe got a promotion, or we had an unexpected check come in, and maybe we've had a couple of glasses of wine, and a really good meal, and we're with our very best friends, and we're just feeling like at the top of height, and maybe there's a beautiful scene outside, or just a beautiful house, and we just sort of feel sublime, and it just feels so effortless, as if God is in the world, and as if everything is just right with the world, and right with us, and we just have this profound sense of the sublime, and of the divine, and of wonder, and maybe the story about Jesus is a story like that.

[16:00] The story about Jesus is not a story like that. The story about Jesus is not about the divine, it's not about the sublime, it's not about the exalted. In fact, the story about Jesus is completely and utterly shocking.

It's about the fact that the word became flesh. The word became flesh. God took into himself all that makes us human.

It's not about divine, it's not about divinity, it's not about spirituality, it's ultimately a story that has at its very center that the eternal God, the creator of all things, the transcendent God, the imminent God, that that very God took into himself our human nature and became flesh.

The words are very, very striking and very, very stark. Listen to what John says. And the word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

The gospel is the good news about a man named Jesus. John begins his story by talking about the very, very beginning of all things. And whatever is going to be about the story of Jesus has its roots and its basis in the very, very beginning of all things.

[17:35] It's not a story about exalted ideas or principles or human achieving or human attainment. It's not something which is beckoning us to ascetic principles or to the sublime or to the exalted.

It is ultimately going to be the story of the word becoming flesh and dwelling among us so that we might behold his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, the one who is full of grace and truth.

And God is going to be the one who is going to determine what glory and what truth and all of these things mean. As we read the story of Jesus as recorded in John, he is going to turn glory upside down and splendor upside down and our expectations upside down and our beliefs in our own power.

John is going to attempt to crush us of all of these things and say the story is not about George, it's not about Christians, it's not about the church. The story that matters is the story of Jesus, the man who was also the Son of God who came and dwelt among us.

My very final words would be from John chapter 20. John at the end of his story tells us why he wrote this whole story and he says this, And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples which are not written in this book, but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.

[19:07] Let's bow our heads in prayer. Father, we want to know Jesus.

Help us to know your Son of God in all of the depths of who he is as a person and all of the depths and wonders of what he has accomplished for us as human beings.

We ask, Father, that you would humble us and help us to put to death our own desires for glory, our own desires for preeminence, our own desires to achieve in spiritual matters, to win in spiritual

matters, to accomplish, to master, to overwhelm, to put in place.

We ask, Father, that you would humble us of all of these natural desires, these so-called natural desires that we have at this time, that your Holy Spirit would so fall upon us that we might be humbled, that we might be stilled, that we might be so inwardly healed, that we are able to receive that which you alone can give, that which your Son alone can give and has accomplished.

Father, please humble us and fan into flame within us a deep longing and yearning and desire to receive that which you alone can give in the person of your Son, Jesus Christ.

[20 : 56] All this we ask in the name of Jesus, your Son, and our Saviour. Amen.