

Untitled (59)

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Date: 24 December 2015

[0:00] Amen. Long ago, God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets. But in these last days, he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. So one thing I've found in my life is that life with a toddler in the house is never a dull thing.

Now, some of the things that are involved with that, I'm not sure I ever could have prepared myself for. One of those is the fact that a parent finds himself or herself watching the same TV shows and movies about 500,000 times.

Anyone else been there? Yeah. Now, especially, I never would have guessed that I'd spend so much of my time watching My Little Pony, and even playing with My Little Pony dolls.

Sometimes even with my daughter, right? Um, that said, in the Evans household, the movie of choice this week has been The Grinch Who Stole Christmas.

[1:07] Everyone familiar with that one? Yeah. Anyone remember that nonsensical song that the Whos sing throughout the whole thing? Yeah.

Even though I don't know the words, and I'm not sure anyone does, I find myself singing that thing constantly, much to the dismay of my family. Anyway, I would probably sing a little bit of it for all of you now, but you'd probably just decide I needed to keep my day job.

But anyway, as most of us know who have seen the movie, what happens is that the Grinch, who hates Christmas, right, decides to sabotage it for the Whos by stealing all of their presents.

What he finds, however, is that even though he stole all of their presents and their decorations and all that good stuff, they're still happy and festive on Christmas morning. Now, maybe what happened is that the Grinch forgot to steal their spiked eggnog, and that's why they're so festive still.

But it seems to me that they're festive because of the warm and fuzzy feelings that come with Christmas, right? The Grinch has a change of heart, decides to go and be warm and fuzzy with them.

[2:16] Moral of the story seems to be that Christmas isn't really about presents, it's about feeling warm and fuzzy. Now, I think most of us learn early on that if Christmas is only about presents, it's going to be disappointing.

Anyone remember hoping for something awesome and then getting a fruitcake or an ugly sweater? Yeah, it happens to the best of us. But what about Christmas being about warm and fuzzy feelings? Now, we might think that's the meaning of Christmas as long as our lives are going perfectly when Christmas rolls around. If there's a great cover of white snow on the ground, it's not Syracuse this time of year, this year at least, and we're feeling happy.

But what about when things are difficult? When we're dealing during the holiday season with family trouble or with illness, with hardship, you know, we're dealing with the loss of loved ones and we feel their absence more keenly during the holiday season.

What then? What when we don't feel warm and fuzzy? Has the meaning of Christmas been lost? Is there only meaning in Christmas when things are going great?

[3:34] Or does what we celebrate on Christmas give us a hope that goes deeper than how we happen to feel at the moment? Deeper than the stuff that is wrapped under the tree?

Now, many of us know the account of the birth of Jesus that we just read in Luke 2. Does it give us any clues to the hope that we celebrate at Christmas?

I think that it does. Think about what the angel says to the shepherds in verses 10 and 11. The angel said to them, Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. Good news of great joy.

Not good news of good stuff wrapped under the tree. Not good news necessarily of feeling festive. Not even good news of everything going great all of the time.

[4:41] Good news of a Savior, Jesus Christ the Lord. And that's good news precisely because we know that everything doesn't go perfectly all the time.

If things were perfect, if things weren't messy, if we weren't in a bind, if we weren't in need of rescue, we would not need a Savior. But we are and we do.

And so what is this mess that we're in? Who is this baby in the manger that we call the Lord? How does all of this come together? What is going on here? Now I think that we have gotten so comfortable and familiar with the cozy story of the cute baby in the manger that we forget what's happening.

There is more than an ordinary birth of an ordinary baby going on here. Much more. And it's not all safe and cozy and fuzzy. Not at all. The birth of this baby Jesus is a rescue mission.

It is an invasion into enemy territory by the Savior. It is God becoming man, becoming a baby to rescue us in power and might.

[6:03] It is an act of warfare. Of epic proportions. C.S. Lewis describes this reality so well in his classic book, *Mere Christianity*, when he writes as he sets up the presentation of this.

One of the things that surprised me when I first read the New Testament seriously was that it talks so much about a dark power in the universe. A mighty evil spirit who was held to be the power behind death and disease and sin.

Now Lewis goes on to talk about how we live in the universe that is in the midst of a civil war. Right? A rebellion led by this dark power that we call the devil against the rightful reign of the good and rightful king and creator, God. Now if we have any doubt about that, we only have to look at our lives and look at the world around us and ask if we see the signs of war.

Death, disease, and sin. As Lewis summarizes for us, right? And death, disease, and sin make it hard for us to feel warm and fuzzy all the time.

[7:24] Even when it's that time of year we're supposed to feel warm and fuzzy. And Jesus wasn't born into a world that's warm and fuzzy all the time. He was born into the world that we live in.

A world that is a war zone. Enemy-occupied territory, as Lewis reminds us. And he goes on to tell us why Jesus was born when he writes, Christianity is the story of how the rightful king has landed. You might say landed in disguise. And is calling us all to take part in a great campaign of sabotage. Jesus is this rightful king.

The king because he is God, in disguise because he became a man, became a baby. And his becoming a baby that we celebrate tonight is the beginning of the rescue mission of the rightful king.

A mission to rescue us. And a mission that he calls us to take part in. A mission to defeat sin, death, and the devil.

[8:38] And the hold that they have on us. That's why he was born, brothers and sisters. As Charles Wesley put it in that great Christmas hymn, Hark the Herald Angels Sing, Born that man no more may die.

Born to raise the sons of earth. Born to give them second birth. Jesus, that baby in the manger. That baby who is also God. Born to save us from our sins.

Born to give us eternal life. Born to rescue us from our captivity to the power of the devil. That is what is happening.

That is what we're celebrating. God the Son became a man, became a baby because God knew that we were in such a bind in the enemy occupied territory that we're in.

That only he himself could rescue us. That's what we see reflected in Hebrews 1, which we read a few minutes ago. Long ago, God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets.

[9:50] But in these last days, he has spoken to us by a son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being.

And he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high.

Jesus, the Son of God, fully God and fully man. That is the baby in the manger. That is the Savior that the angels told the shepherds about.

That is the one that we worship because he is our hope, our rescuer. He is the rightful king and he has come to rescue us from sin, death, and the devil.

This baby that we celebrate tonight grew up to live a life of perfect obedience to the will of the Father. To answer for our disobedience. To answer for our rebellion. Grew up to die on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins.

[10:54] To wash away our sins with his blood. And to rise again from the dead three days later and release us from the power of death.

To give us eternal life. That baby in the manger that we celebrate tonight is the mighty Savior. King of kings and Lord of lords. So, when we're asking, why did he come? One of the best summaries I've seen on that topic is familiar to many of us.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son. So that everyone who believes in him may not perish, but have eternal life. And that is what Christmas is all about.

Not the presence under the tree. Not warm and fuzzy feelings that will let us down if we're not feeling warm and fuzzy. But a hope that lasts.

[12:01] A hope that is eternal. A hope that nothing can defeat. A hope that cannot be taken from us. A hope that the sufferings of this present time.

Can't overshadow. The hope of eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord. I'm reminded of a story that my grandfather used to tell.

For he left the slave to be with Jesus a few years ago. When my grandfather was a little boy, his family's house caught fire right around Christmas time.

Basically burned to the ground. They basically lost everything they had. One thing he remembered, though, was finding a toy truck that was supposed to be his Christmas gift.

Playing with it in the ashes of their house that they had lost. Now, I am reminded of this story and reminded of this gift because it reminds me of another Christmas gift.

[13:04] The only gift that we can count on to last, even if everything around us fades to dust and burns to ashes. And that is the gift of Jesus Christ.

The gift of eternal life that is ours through faith in him. We need to be reminded of that gift and that hope tonight.

We need to be reminded because even if it is the season to be jolly, many of us have heavy hearts. If we don't have heavy hearts this Christmas, we will eventually.

Because going back to what Lewis wrote, we live in a war zone. A war zone where the devil wages war on his captives through death and sin. And we all bear the wounds and the scars of that war in some way or another.

And so do the people that we love. But tonight, we remember. We remember that the rightful king has landed in this enemy-occupied territory.

[14:10] We remember that he has come to us on a rescue mission. That he has come to wage war on the devil and to trample him under his feet.

And to release and to save and to rescue those who have been held in slavery. And heal those who have been wounded. We remember that he is going to win.

And we remember that he calls us to join him. To be part of his mission. And that call to be a part of it is important.

Because none of us are here by accident tonight. Now, I don't know precisely the place where each of you may be spiritually. But God knows where you are.

He knows you. He knows your heart. And God called each of us to be here tonight for a reason.

And that reason is that we would hear the message of the gospel.

[15:16] Which is the real meaning of Christmas. Now, maybe some here tonight have never heard the gospel message. Or maybe they've heard it, but have never placed their faith in Jesus.

Never known Jesus as Savior. If that's you tonight, then know that God calls you to believe in his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And to receive eternal life and forgiveness of sin. And to find joy and hope and healing in Jesus.

Maybe some of us here tonight have known Christ.

But we've had our faith grow cold or we've gone astray. If that's you tonight. Know that God calls you to return to him.

Calls you to find joy in him again. Maybe some of us here have gotten discouraged. And we're feeling that tonight. If that's you, then hear the voice of the Lord calling you to hope in Jesus. [16 : 19] His voice assuring you that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ. Maybe some of us here tonight have gotten distracted. If that's you, take this opportunity to refocus on Christ.

And maybe some of us here tonight are running with endurance the race that is set before us. And walking by faith. Praise God. If that's you, then hear the gospel again. As your motivation. And keep looking to Jesus, the author and finisher of your faith. To all who hear and believe.

Listen to the words of the angel to the shepherds and rejoice. Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord.

Merry Christmas to all of you. God bless you. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.