

God's Christmas Cracker

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[0:00] Let's pray. Father, thanks so much for this Christmas Day and we thank you for the reminder of Christ's birth into the world and what he was born to do. And so Father, help us to reflect on it and particularly reflect on what it means for us today as people, as individuals. And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, can I add my words of Merry Christmas? That's your chance to say it back to me. You've not said it to me yet. No, no, that was terrible. Let's try it again. Merry Christmas.

Oh, that was much better. Thank you. I feel loved now. As Dev said, we've made it, haven't we? It's been busy, but we're finally here and it's great to see you all here this morning, especially if you're visiting us. Now, I'm not sure what you've got planned for Christmas today, but my family will be doing Christmas lunch. And on the table, we'll also have these Christmas crackers. I don't know if you've seen these in Coles before. It just says 12 festive Christmas crackers. And it's all a bit of fun, really, isn't it? You kind of, you take one out of the box and you pull it and there's some things inside. So we've got a kid. Come on, Tim. The minister's son always gets stuck with it.

All right. So you pull it together. One, two, three, go. Ha! No, no. You can know that. All right. Terrific. You pull it with someone else and there's usually three things inside it, isn't there? So one thing is a one-liner and it's meant to be a joke.

Why do birds fly south in winter? Because it's too far to walk. Yeah, yeah. But there's actually worse ones than that. Here's some other ones. There's 26 letters in the normal alphabet. How many in the Christmas alphabet? 25. There's no L. Yeah, yeah. It gets better. What do you get if you cross Santa with a duck? A Christmas quacker? Yeah, it gets, you get a one-liner. This is not my jokes.

You get a one-liner that often makes you groan more than laugh, don't you? That's a Christmas cracker. But you also got in a Christmas cracker, you get a bit of a crown that looks like this.

[2:25] Here it is. I've got an orange one here. And it's a bit of a hat, but it looks like a crown and you kind of put it on your head and like you're a king. So here we go. Yeah, there we are. And you also get a present of sorts. This is a big pink paperclip. And if it was to go over some things, it's not very, yeah, no, it's not very strong at all. It's cheap and it usually gets thrown out at the end of the day.

I'm going to take this off for now. But anyway, so here's our Christmas crackers. And as I said, it's a bit of fun and it's, you know, especially for the kids. And the reason I'm telling you this this morning is because today's Bible reading is not the usual Christmas reading. And that's because we've already done the usual readings over the past few weeks here at Holy Trinity. But today's reading still speaks about Christmas, I think. In fact, I think it's a real Christmas cracker, if you like, in both senses. That is in verses numbers 15 to 17 are like God's Christmas cracker.

If you look at the second paragraph there on your outlines on here, you'll notice, and we'll work through it in a moment, but you'll notice in verses 15 to 17, there is a one liner, there is a crown or talk of a king, and there is a present. But they are somewhat different to the ones we get in these coals Christmas crackers. But before we get to that, let me give you some very brief background.

The Apostle Paul is writing this first letter to a man called Timothy, which is why it's called 1 Timothy or 1 Timothy. And Paul wants to remind Timothy about how important the Christian message is so that Timothy might keep sharing it with others despite the opposition he was facing.

Now to show how important this Christian message is, Paul gives Timothy and us an example from his own life in these verses. And he shows us how this Christian message has changed him and benefited him.

[4:27] And so look at the first paragraph on your outlines there, verse number 12 to 14. He says, I thank Christ Jesus, our Lord, who has given me strength, that he's considered me trustworthy, appointing me to his service. Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. You see, this message about Christ Jesus has changed Paul for the better. It has changed him from a violent persecutor to a faithful preacher, from hating Christians to helping people become Christians, from being an enemy of the Lord Jesus to receiving abundant grace from the Lord Jesus. In fact, the word for abundantly there is literally super abundant. The grace or generosity, that's what grace is, God's generosity, has been poured out to him in super abundance. And it's all come through hearing the message about Jesus Christ, the message that Timothy is to keep sharing. And so what is this message? Well, here, we come to the Christmas cracker, God's Christmas cracker, verse numbers 15 to 17. And it begins with a one-liner that is not a corny joke that makes us groan, but it's a trustworthy saying that actually brings joy. Have a look at verse number 15. Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance.

Christ Jesus came into the world at Christmas to save sinners of whom I am the worst, he says. Here is the one-liner of God's Christmas cracker. And it gives us the reason for the season, the purpose of Jesus's birth. It says, Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. This is why Jesus was born that very first Christmas. I was looking for some gifts for our children, and one of my daughters especially loves dancing. And so I came across this t-shirt on the next slide.

And it says, born to dance, forced to go to school. Now, when she saw it, she loved it. Unfortunately, we had just missed the postage deadline to get it to Christmas on time, so we couldn't order it. It was a shame, I know. She suggested that I pay extra to get it on time.

It was very gracious of her. And then I said, well, why don't we get a different t-shirt? How about the one on the next slide that says, Jesus is better than dancing? She didn't like that one so much. Now, she is a good dancer, and perhaps she was born to dance, among other things. I don't know. But what I do know is that Jesus was born to save sinners. And this one-liner, as I said, it's not a joke that makes us groan, but it's a trustworthy saying that brings us joy and is worth accepting. Why? Because it gives us the only way we can be saved. You see, we are actually all sinners, which brings us to the crown part of the Christmas cracker. You see, a sinner is someone who seeks to be king of their own lives instead of letting God be king. Verse number 17 in your Bible readings there says that God is the only God and king who ought to be honored. And yet we ignore God as king and put the crown on our own head, kind of like these Christmas crackers.

So if I just kind of write a big capital I on the crown, and this is effectively what we do. We say, oh, God's king, but you know what? I'm going to be king. I'm going to do what I want. In the old words of Frank Sinatra, old blue eyes, I did it my way rather than God's way. That's what it means to sin. In fact, I often, I'm not going to keep this crown on my head. We'll put it there. In fact, I often write the word sin like this on the next slide with a capital I, because that's what sin's about. I for ignoring God and doing what I want instead of what God wants. So instead of being patient and selfless as God wants, we are often impatient and selfish as we want. Instead of remembering to thank God when we enjoy the good things, we forget to thank God. Though we always seem to remember to blame God for the bad things. And instead of living to honor God as king, we honor ourselves or our family or career as king, as above God. This is what it means to be a sinner. And we've all done it. But it means we all deserve judgment then. That's the bad news. I mean, we all know the saying, if you do the crime, you have to do the time. That's fair. That's justice.

[9:33] The only problem is the time for this particular crime of dishonoring God. Well, the time is eternal judgment. But Jesus came into the world to save us sinners from that judgment.

How? Well, by taking it all upon himself in one excruciating hit at the cross. And by taking our judgment in our place, we can now be saved from it. 11 days ago marked the anniversary of the shooting in Sandy Hook Elementary School. On the 14th of December 2012, a gunman entered the school and opened fire. I don't know if you remember that. But as you might remember, a teacher called Victoria Soto gave her life to save her students. In fact, on the next slide, the headline of the article said, the heroic teacher who gave her life to save terrified children. And beneath the headline, it says, Victoria died a hero as she protected her students.

How? Well, it says by shielding the children by putting herself between them and the gunman. Now, it's an amazing story of sacrifice to save others, isn't it? But at Christmas time, we remember another amazing story that this child called Jesus came into the world to save sinners. And he did it by growing up and sacrificing himself at the cross, by putting himself between us and God's judgment that we deserve. And the big difference, of course, is that those children did not deserve to be shot by the gunman, nor did Victoria. But we deserve to be judged for our sins.

Do the crime, you do the time. Yet at the cross, Jesus shielded us from that judgment so that we can be saved from it, you see. This is how Jesus Christ saves sinners. And Paul is saying here that if he, the worst of sinners, the one who really deserves judgment for persecuting God's church, if he, the worst of sinners, can be saved, well, anyone can be saved. Have a look at sentence number 16. It says, but for that very reason, I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life. You see, Paul is an example of someone who was deserving of judgment.

And yet even he has been saved by Christ Jesus. It doesn't mean he no longer sinned. Rather, it means he no longer needed to fear the judgment of his sin. He no longer needed to fear eternal death.

[12:23] Instead, he was given the guarantee of eternal life. And here we come to the present part of our Christmas cracker. You see, God not only gave us his son born to save sinners, but he also gives us life eternal. And this is not a stingy toy that is lucky to last the day like my pink paperclip.

No, this is a generous gift that lasts for, well, eternity. It's eternal life. It's new spiritual life with God now, which lasts forever. And new physical life with God later in heaven, which will also last forever. And what's more, this present that lasts for, it was expensive. It was very expensive.

God had to give up his only son to pay for our sin so that we could have this present. See, God's Christmas cracker present is not stingy or cheap, is it? It's an extraordinarily generous gift. No wonder Paul said earlier that the grace he has received is super abundant. But do notice verse 16 at the halfway through there, it says, all this is for those who would believe in him. Do you see that there?

God's Christmas cracker with this one liner about Jesus who came into the world to save sinners, us who crowned ourselves as king to give us the present of eternal life. All this is only for those who would believe in Jesus. And so can I ask you this morning, do you believe in Jesus? Do you believe he really did come to earth, born at Christmas time, to grow up and die at Easter time, to save us sinners?

Have you accepted this trustworthy saying that's worth accepting? Our extended family has grown over the years, as my brothers and sister have children of their own.

[14:22] And so my side of the family has decided to, this year, just give presents to the kids and not the adults to kind of try and save costs. And now if you do that, there's nothing wrong with that. But there is, I think, a danger that we begin to think Christmas is just for the kids.

Oh, we'll just get presents for the kids. It's just all for the kids. But this Christmas message is for adults too. You see, Christmas begins with Christ, who came into the world to save sinners, not just kids, but adults as well.

And so again, can I ask you, do you believe in Jesus? Do you trust in him as your saviour and treat him as your Lord? If you haven't and you would like to, then please do catch me after the service or email me.

And for those who do already believe in Jesus, then does this Christmas cracker make us groan because we've heard it all before? Or does it still make us rejoice that God was willing to do all this for us?

Do we still believe it to be joy to the world as we'll sing towards the end of our service? And what's more, does it cause us to respond in praise to God, the true King?

[15:36] After all, that's how Paul finishes in verse number 17. Do you see there? He ends with a note of praise. He says, Paul ends God's Christmas cracker by praising God the King who sent God the Son into the world to save sinners.

And so do we continue to praise God for this? Do we who believe continue to honour God as the King in our lives? I take it most of you will also sit down to Christmas lunch or dinner of sorts today.

And as you do, why not then take a moment to thank and praise God? Not just for the food and don't forget to thank God for the people who cooked it as well. But also for sending his Son into the world to save you and me.

And if you do have a Christmas cracker like we will, then why not write on the Christmas cracker, you know, put a big G for God on it and then you can put it on your head like that.

Okay, maybe that's a bit corny. Maybe you don't have to do that. Maybe instead pray as well when you say grace, that you might be able to honour God with your lives because he is the true King who sent his only Son into the world to save sinners like us.

[17:02] And that truth is still worth rejoicing over, is it not? Let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we do thank you for this great Christmas cracker, for the line that says that Jesus Christ came into the world, born at Christmas to save sinners.

And for us who believe to give us the present of eternal life. Our Father, we pray that you would help us who don't yet believe to believe. And for us who do already, we pray that you would help us to honour you as our King and praise you for our Saviour.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.