

The Saviour has come to unite His people

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 23 December 2018

Preacher: Mark Chew

[0 : 0 0] I want to start with a question tonight, which I'm going to get you to talk to each other about. And I actually, you know, for once, don't have the answer to it.

The question's actually at the top of the outline there. And honest, I actually, I know people think I ask questions and then have the answer. I don't. And the question is, what unites us? What do you think unites us as Australians?

What is it that makes Australians unique that can draw us together? So open question. So why don't you just turn to the person next to you, have a chat about it. And then we've actually got a roving mic. I want to hear some answers, actually.

All right. I actually want to hear some answers. So why don't you put up your hands and give me some ideas of what you think unite us as Australians. Well, Dave and then Brenton, next.

Multiculturalism and the good old AFL. Go Hawks. Okay. I'd say love of Tim Tams.

[1 : 0 4] Love of Tim Tams. Okay. Anyone else? Kevin? I think there's a nationwide conspiracy regarding drop bears. I don't think I get that one.

But anyway. Anyway. Any more? We're going really deep here at the moment. Maybe.

Yeah, we discussed about the aspect of mateship at the workplace with friends, how Australians tend to casually banter with each other, and that's how they share their endearment to each other.

Okay. All right. And I think, Daniel, let's go with one more down the back. Daniel. I think that we treat our leaders as a big joke is unique to Australia. I think that might be it, actually.

Now, as you can tell from the answers, there's quite a lot of variety, right? And I reckon if I did a survey and I said, look, who actually believes in this stuff, I'm pretty sure that we wouldn't get, I mean, we wouldn't get 100%.

[2 : 1 3] I don't even know whether we'll get 80% or 90% of people agreeing that that's the thing that unites us. So, for example, Vincent talked about mateship.

And I think in the past, yep, that's been talked about a lot, although I'm not sure exactly what that is, actually, apart from loyalty and friendship, and how is that unique to Australians.

And besides, that's rather, I have to say, rather blokey kind of thing. So it's sort of a bit off-putting to half of the population, I think. There are calls nowadays to unite around our indigenous history.

But even then, that's proved contentious, isn't it? Because we've had arguments over, you know, whether 1788 was the year of white settlement or white invasion.

And then they've talked about multiculturalism. But I actually think with multiculturalism and with Christianity not being the default religion anymore, it's actually harder to determine what unites Australians today.

[3 : 15] Maybe it's the cricket. Love of the sun and surf. I've talked to people who don't like the sun and the surf. And they're Australians.

So I thought perhaps, you know, I might get some clues by looking at our national anthem. You guys know that, right? By heart, they make it, sing it at school. Australians, all let us rejoice, for we are young and free.

With golden soil and wealth for toil, our home is girt by sea. There's not much to go with there, is it? Free, young. Are they sort of things that, you know, who, who, you know, there are some people here who probably don't think they're young.

Perhaps it's this whole notion of the lucky country, you know, golden soil and wealth for toil. You know, work hard, follow our dreams, and success will be ours. Again, not sure.

And maybe what really unites us is that last phrase there, home is girt by sea. Because face it, we're all stuck here on this huge island, and we've got to learn to put up with each other, whether we like it or not.

[4 : 26] Girt by sea. Now, you may be wondering why I'm asking this question, and the reason is that in our last, in the last of our Advent series, I want to tonight look at the Bible and say that it shows us that in a world that's constantly searching for unity, for peace, Jesus is the one person that is able to unite us, and across the spectrum of differences and diversity.

Jesus is the one person who can give us a place where we can call home, a place where we can belong. And that's not just a theoretical question, is it?

Because deep down, we all desire to have that, to have a place we can belong to, which is more than just a roof over our heads. And so as we shall see, this unity that Jesus brings is actually tied to his coming into this world.

And to see that, we'll turn to that passage that we read, that Sandra read for us in Isaiah 49. Now, many of you will know that this is one of the servant songs in Isaiah.

The servant in Isaiah is a mysterious but messianic figure, but his identity is finally revealed when Jesus comes, because he, Jesus, fulfills all the prophecies about the servant.

[5 : 48] Now, normally, the servant isn't associated with Christmas. I haven't heard a sermon where we have Christmas and the servant tied together. And yet, if we look carefully at Isaiah 49, here's an account of the servant's birth, isn't there?

And surprise, surprise, as we look at the detail, and then we look at the events of Jesus' birth, they actually closely tied together. So let's look firstly at verses 1 and 2 of Isaiah 49, where the servant's birth is announced.

As I say in my outline, with this announcement, we're told that he's caught before his birth, kept safe from harm, in order that he may fulfill his mission.

So verse 1, the servant speaks. Listen to me, you islands. Hear this, you distant nations. Before I was born, the Lord called me. From my mother's womb, he has spoken my name.

He made my mouth like a sharpened sword. In the shadow of his hand, he hid me. He made me into a polished arrow and concealed me in his quiver.

[6 : 53] Now, to my knowledge, Matthew, the Gospel writer, does not explicitly reference this passage. But if you looked at his account in chapter 1 and 2 of the Christmas story, it's actually intriguing how many points of contact there are.

So for instance, the angel appears to Joseph while Joseph, Jesus, was in his mother's womb to speak his name. The angel says that he's to be called Jesus, the one who will save his people, and Emmanuel, because he's God with us.

Then in chapter 2, we see the wise men come from distant lands, as though responding to the servant's call in verse 1 of chapter 49. And then verse 7, just as the kings and princes did, they arise from their distant lands and come to worship and bow down before Jesus.

As for the references to being hidden in God's hand and concealed in his quiver, we see that in how God protects Jesus from King Herod. So first, when he was in Bethlehem, the wise men were warned by God, weren't they?

Not in a dream, not to return to Herod. I've got the verse there on the slide. Then by telling Joseph in his dream afterwards to go and hide out in Egypt.

[8 : 12] And then finally, on their return to Israel from Egypt, God again tells Joseph in yet another dream not to settle in Galilee, not to settle in Judea, sorry, but in Galilee.

Why? Because Archelaus, Herod's son, was there. So it's all really fulfillment of chapter 49. Jesus is kept safe in order then he might grow up to fulfill his mission.

And we will see details of this in verses 3 to 6 of chapter 49. But again, here in verse 2 of chapter 49, we get an inkling of that mission. So we see, for instance, that his mission will be prophetic, for his mouth will be like a sharpened sword.

If you excuse my pun, Jesus will have a pointed message for the people with the aim of calling them to repentance and submission.

That's what the images of a sharpened sword and a polished arrow imply. Conquest and rule, Jesus is coming to achieve a victory for God.

[9 : 18] But this victory will come in an unexpected way. For we discover now in verses 3 and 4, when God says of Jesus, his servant, he says this, You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor.

But I said, I have labored in vain. I have spent my strength for nothing at all. Yet what is due me is in the Lord's hand and my reward is with my God.

So yes, Jesus will come to display God's glory and yet, it would seem like what he's doing is for nothing, is a failure. It would seem that he has labored in vain and spent his strength for nothing.

I wonder whether you've ever worked on something that seemed like a lost cause. For me, over the last week, it's like trying to find a car park at Westfield.

Or, my family trying to find me a perfect gift for Christmas. It's impossible to buy for. Or more seriously, perhaps you've been trying to persuade someone you love about Jesus to no avail.

[10 : 28] Well, this was probably how Jesus felt about his ministry at times because as he was going about it, he was fiercely opposed in his preaching. When he performed his miracles, some of them told him that he was demon-possessed.

And almost no one in authority recognized him. And what was the crowning moment of his ministry? His betrayal, his trial, and then death on the cross.

All throughout his public ministry, Jesus must have seemed like a failure, at least to those looking upon him. And yet, and yet, his death was indeed his crowning glory because it showed us the extent of God's love.

And because at that very moment, that was when he accomplished God's mission for him. And it displayed God's glory at its greatest because at the cross, God triumphed over sin and death.

death. The plan that he had from the beginning, remember three weeks ago with Devin, the promise that he made in Genesis 3 to crush the serpent's head, well, that was achieved in Jesus' death.

[11 : 49] And now here in verse 3 of Isaiah, as he promised, God has his reward for Jesus by raising him from the dead and making him king over all creation.

And as the prophet says here in Isaiah 49, as a result, Israel's relationship with God, which was marred by sin, is now restored.

And so verse 5 says that the father who conceived Jesus formed him in Mary's womb did so firstly to bring Jacob back to him, that is, bring Israel to himself.

This fulfills God's promise to Israel, but as verse 6 goes on to say, there is more in store. But wait, there's more. For, verse 6, it is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept.

I will also make you a light for the Gentiles that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth. Which is why, again, to recap two weeks ago, we saw how with Christmas we have the most wonderful gift of peace with God.

[13 : 00] And this is available whether you're a Jew or not, whether you're of Israel or of the Gentiles, God has come to make peace with you. Anyone can be saved through the forgiveness of their sins if we humble ourselves before God and submit to his son, Jesus.

Jesus' mission wasn't restricted to just saving the Jews but rescuing all nations and tribes in the world. Jesus isn't just the king of Israel, he's the ruler of the entire world.

And so then we have the promise of verse 7 where even though he's despised and looked down upon, kings and princes will eventually come to him and bow down in worship to him because God has chosen Jesus as his great king.

Now if you've been with us over the last few weeks then none of this I'm saying today is news to you. During our Advent series we've seen in various Old Testament passages how Jesus is the promised saviour who comes to conquer sin and to give us peace with God.

But if you're hearing this for the first time tonight then can I again invite you to take the chance this Christmas to find peace with God through his son Jesus.

[14 : 24] Come to this child who becomes a saviour for us so that you may find life and joy and peace in his kingdom. That's the best thing you can do for yourself this Christmas.

But as for the rest of us those who already belong to his kingdom then this Christmas I like to encourage us to be thankful. You see we can become a bit blasé can't we with Christmas.

You know we've been a Christian a while and year in year out it's the same routine the same carols. It can sort of make us forget can't it how wonderful it is to actually belong to God's kingdom.

But actually when you look around what normally happens is that people naturally gravitate towards others that are like them. And this is particularly true over Christmas you know our natural focus at this time is to go back to family or seek out friends we want to catch up with and there's nothing wrong with that but that's what people do.

They seek out and hang out with people that are like them. But God's kingdom is the only place where Jesus unites those who would not normally hang out with each other into the one place.

[15 : 49] God's kingdom is the only place where anyone and everyone can come to Jesus and find a place to call home. In our second reading from Revelation tonight we see this wonderful fulfillment of Isaiah 49.

Jesus the servant is now portrayed the Lamb of God and the scene is the heavenly throne room of God. Now many people think oh this is in the future you know when Jesus comes again no but actually this is not a future reality but a present one because Jesus is already right now seated in God's throne.

So look with me again I've got the verses on the slide Revelation chapter 7 verse 9 and this is what we see there is a great multitude that no one could count from every nation tribe, people and language standing before the throne and before the Lamb and so everyone not simply kings and princes are now bowing before the Lamb and worshipping him.

But I want you to notice what are they wearing? What are they wearing? White robes. It's funny isn't it? We can still tell the race and the language and you know the tribe and the tongue and all that but it appears that all other social differences are now discarded.

So the rich are no longer wearing their Giorgio Armani suits or magpack puff jackets and all this stuff that we spend millions at Christmas trying to buy to differentiate ourselves from none of that matters anymore.

[17 : 22] Instead they're wearing white robes pure and brilliant not because they're washed with Nepisan gold but as it says in verse 14 because they're washed and made white by the blood of Jesus.

That is people belong because of Jesus what Jesus has done for them. Not because of who they are not because of what they've done we belong to God's kingdom solely because of what Jesus has done for us.

It's a great leveler isn't it? And such a liberating truth and so different to how everything else works in this world.

You see God's kingdom isn't one which was originally male dominated and the space has to be made for women to join nor was it originally for the rich and they've had to change the rules so that the poor can come in.

There's no need to campaign for equal rights or to fight to end discrimination. If anything there's only one priority that could be argued and that is Jesus came firstly for the Jews to bring them back to God before extending salvation to the Gentiles.

[18 : 37] But even here there's no suggestion or room for privilege is there? Because Israel was simply a recipient of God's grace and they're simply now making room for others on the same basis.

So all of us Jew or Gentile male or female rich or poor we're all dressed in white robes. we belong only because of what Jesus has done for us.

Sometimes when we come to church it's the differences that seem to always grab our attention doesn't it? Oh there's no one my age here or everyone seems to be talking about things that I'm not interested in or they're all dressed so much better or worse than I am.

but maybe perhaps instead of focusing on our differences why not this Christmas and every week every Sunday for the rest of our lives why not focus and concentrate on what unites us instead?

Why not remember that we're all dressed in white robes? That we're united because of Jesus salvation for us? And as we speak to one another why not rejoice in all these despite our differences that we share in so many wonderful things together?

[20 : 01] Like the fact that we're all forgiven by God. Like the truth that we have the same spirit guiding us to live for Jesus. Like the fact that we all have the same promises from God relating to our future our glorious inheritance in Christ Jesus.

and although I know we all have family obligations that we need to think of over Christmas you know what to buy where to go kind of thing why not also realize that for some of our fellow church members church is actually the only place where they truly feel like they can belong because they've not been able to find family or friends to spend Christmas with.

for them God's kingdom is truly a wonderful gift because this is the one place where they can belong. And so maybe if you're able to go out of your way perhaps to express that in a small way maybe you have a seat for them at your family table this Christmas or maybe you have a small gift for them or a card to show that you care.

And while we're at it let's not forget our brothers and sisters across the world too because day after day for instance we've been hearing from China I've been reading stuff that the Chinese government is doing all they can to persecute the church arresting pastors church members stopping them from attending church all because they refuse to participate in the so called official church network in China.

Well these brothers and sisters they belong to the same kingdom as we do. So let's pray for them this Christmas and more than that let's be encouraged by their faith and their courage.

[21 : 53] Friends I don't know whether you as you were growing up you ever had that desire to be part of a certain team or exclusive club or whatever. Maybe it was the school debating team or you know the school footy team or probably for a lot of you the school badminton team.

Or maybe it was just the popular group that you wanted to be part of so that you can get all the invites to the parties. And maybe now that you're older and at work you want to belong to some prestigious company or firm or you want to be accepted into some professional body.

But actually if we put our trust in Jesus then we already belong to the most wonderful body, the body of Christ and the kingdom of God. God. And all this is possible because Jesus has come to die for us so that we might be restored in our relationship with God.

And so brothers and sisters, this Christmas let's rejoice in this gift, this wonderful gift. Let's give thanks that we have a place to belong because Jesus has come to die for us.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you again for sending your son Jesus to die for us and to restore us to fellowship with you.

[23 : 13] Thank you that you have come not just to restore Israel but to bring salvation to the entire world, to Gentiles as well. And therefore you have united us into the kingdom of God whether we're Jew or Gentile.

And thank you that we can belong to your kingdom by the grace of God. Help us to live out this unity with great rejoicing. We pray for our brothers and sisters across the world who also belong to this kingdom.

Comfort them in their trials and tribulations and help them to rejoice that even though the world may reject them, they belong to your kingdom. They belong to the kingdom where John says in Revelation chapter 7 and verse 17, the lamb at the center of the throne is their shepherd and he will lead them to strings of living water and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

We pray this in the name of Jesus, the servant of God. Amen.