

CHRISTMAS EVE 11 PM - Jesus, Given for Life

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[0 : 00] You may have heard that Justice Michael Kirby is about to retire soon before his 70th birthday. He's a prominent, outspoken, gay, high court judge for many years.

And recently he gave an address. He was awarded an honorary doctorate. Sounds a good idea to me. I wish I'd got one of those before I had to do the hard work of a proper one. But anyway, at Griffith University in Brisbane, he was awarded an honorary doctorate.

And basically this was the theme of his address. It was reported widely in the media. I want to identify the most important thing we discover in life.

And you can imagine all those people who are there in this academic circle thinking, what's this going to be? And the answer is love. Love, he says, has power to extinguish human rights abuses, discrimination of race and sex and gender.

Well, he's not the first to say things about love like that. Love is a many splendid thing. Love makes the world go round. All you need is love. So sang Christian in the film Moulin Rouge, but he was borrowing from others anyway.

[1 : 16] Love, of course, is very important. And at Christmas time, we often refocus our minds on love. We think about being with our loved ones. We think about gifts for our loved ones and from our loved ones.

We think of loved ones no longer with us or loved ones far away. And love lies very central in our celebration, of course, of Christmas. Although I did hear some good advice on the radio.

It said it's good to invite somebody to your Christmas family gathering who's not a member of the family because it stops the family fighting. I think that's great advice. If you need dinner tomorrow night, let me know.

Perhaps the most famous verse in the Bible is John 3, verse 16, at the end of that second reading. For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that whoever may believe in him may not perish, but may have eternal life.

And that most famous verse is about love. God so loved the world. Past tense. Doesn't mean that God doesn't still love the world.

[2 : 30] He does. But in particular, the focus is on an act of God loving the world. An act of God that in one sense is complete. An act of God in giving his son, Jesus Christ.

But at that point in the verse, it hasn't quite got to that. God loved the world. That's God's design. That's God's overarching attitude. And the action that flows from the attitude for this world.

It's love, predominantly. And the result of love? He gave. Love produces giving.

Love produces giving. Well, true love does. Love produces generosity. Love produces selflessness and other-centeredness. Love doesn't remain closeted in the mind or the heart or the emotion.

Yes, there's a Bible verse that says God is love. That's because God loved and gave. That is, it's not just some philosophical idea about God and his character or attitude.

[3 : 44] It's manifest in activity. It's manifest in activity. And in particular, this love bursts out in action. It can't be constrained in effect.

God loved the world so that he gave. Love bursts out in giving when it is true love.

Love. Often when I'm meeting with couples before their wedding or in our courses that we run, I ask the couples a question along these lines.

How do you know that the other person loves you? How do you know that you love them? Because all very often we have this sort of soppy, sentimental idea of love, that it's a sort of emotion that sort of hovers around boiling points sometimes in our heart.

But love is much more concrete than that. It bursts into generous activity. It bursts out into giving. It can't be constrained if it's real love.

[4 : 51] So with God's love, he gave. How do you know someone loves you? How do you know you love them? It's manifest in the giving. I don't mean the tinsel gifts at Christmas, but the giving of money, of possessions, of time, the giving of things that we value, the giving of attention when we're tired and so on.

Giving is a demonstration, a fundamental demonstration of love. God so loved that he gave. Not just tinsel.

Not just warm fuzzies. He gave his son. He gave his only son. It's not that God had so many that he didn't know what to do with them so he could afford to dispose of one.

He gave his only son. His most precious. Not really a possession, but you know what I mean. God gave what was most costly and precious and dear to him because of love.

And that's what love does. True love gives of itself and keeps giving and keeps giving. It can't control itself in giving when it's true love.

[6 : 11] There's a picture in today's age of Tiffany's in Cotton Street, I think. I never go to places like that. Packed full of men yesterday.

All trying to buy expensive jewellery presents. Costly, precious Christmas gifts for wives or girlfriends or mistresses or mothers or who knows who really, but didn't say who they were for. It was just a picture. And apparently at Louis Vuitton, just up the street, recently opened on the corner of Collins and Russell Street, queues outside trying to get in. People buying expensive, costly, precious gifts.

That's costly giving. Or is it? Is that really a demonstration of love? See, all those gifts that we give, well, most of them I guess, all those customers in Tiffany's or Louis Vuitton, they're buying for people whom they love.

The people they find lovable. People they find lovely. People that they're loving because of some inherent merit or beauty or character in that person.

[7 : 26] Usually. That is, there's something that is reciprocated back. There's something attractive about the object of the love and the giving. God so loved the world.

The verse doesn't mean God so loved the world that he's got love for everybody. That's not the fundamental way of what's being described there. Because throughout John's Gospel in particular, the word world is very negative.

The world is in darkness. The world doesn't know God. The world rejects God and rebels against God. That's the world that God loves. It's an enemy world that God loves.

It's not talking about the breadth of God's love, that it's big enough for the whole world. That's true. But even more profoundly, it's the depth of God's love, that it's a love for even those who reject him, who ignore him, who rebel against him, who hate him.

Most of us don't buy expensive Christmas presents for people like that. But God gave his only son for a world that did not want the gift of his only son.

[8 : 47] God's costly gift is for enemies, is for haters of God. It's a rugged, painful love that culminates on a cross.

But it also is telling us that God's love is indiscriminate. To that extent, I guess Justice Michael Kirby is right. God's love is for the world, without distinction.

It's not for rich people only. It's not for poor people only. It's for the rich and for the poor. It's for the white and the black. It's for people of every culture, every race, every time, of every socioeconomic distinction.

It's for clean people and smelly people. It's for people we like and for people we don't like. God's love is indiscriminate for any.

God so loved the world that he gave his only son. God so loved the world that he gave his only son. So that whoever... It's indiscriminate.

[9 : 59] Whoever. Rich, poor, male, female, young, old, etc. Whoever. You, your neighbour. The person you don't like. Your nasty boss at work.

The people who you hate or irritate you under the skin. Whoever. Whoever. Believes in him. It's open to all. The love of God. Without any discrimination whatsoever.

Believes. Not in the sense of an intellectual assent. That you necessarily believe something is true.

Although that's an aspect of it. But the idea of whoever believes in him has got the sense of trust.

Who has faith in him. Relies upon him. See, I could believe that this chair down here will take my weight if I sit on it. But unless I actually do it, well, it's just an intellectual assent that doesn't

accomplish anything.

Believing in Jesus is putting the intellectual assent into action and trusting him. Trusting him with our life. But it's not just simply trusting the little baby.

[11 : 09] It's not just simply trusting the cute Christmas story. There's a particular focus. It's belief in him, in Jesus. So it's certainly Jesus is the focus of our trust and faith and belief.

But even more particular, there's a sharper focus still. The verses immediately before this most famous verse recall an event in the Old Testament.

On the border of Jordan and Israel today, overlooking the north end of the Dead Sea, a place called Mount Nebo commemorating the place where Moses died, there is a big statue made out of metal, maybe bronze, I'm not sure.

On the top of this pole is a snake, a serpent. It commemorates the time in the wilderness when God said to Moses, cast this bronze statue on a pole, a snake on the top.

Whoever looks up to it will not die from the serpents that are around in the wilderness. That is, act in trust. And John says, just before this famous verse, just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man, Jesus, be lifted up.

[12 : 25] You see, the object, the particular pinpoint focus of our faith is not simply in a Jesus meek and mild, a Jesus a baby, but in Jesus lifted up, meaning to die on the cross.

That's where our salvation is found. That's why he came and was born. So whoever believes in him, trusts in his death, that is, that takes away our sins, they may not perish, but may have eternal life.

God's design is love. Our duty is to believe or have faith. And the reason for this is the danger.

The design, love. The duty, faith. The danger, perishing. Real danger. So what, many people say.

When you die, that's it. Dust to dust, ashes to ashes, that's it. Enjoy your life, there's nothing more.

For them, perishing is nothing to be afraid of. But it's not what God thinks.

[13 : 38] And I'd rather value what God thinks than somebody who hasn't gone through it. See, Jesus has been through it. And I think what he says about death and perishing is worth heeding.

It's a real warning. We ought not be satisfied simply to perish. To be cut off from God forever. To be part of a godless hell.

Under the anger of God. No thanks, not for me. Why does God love? Because the danger is real.

And the love of God is warning us about a real danger.

That unless we turn and look to Jesus dying for us in faith, then perishing is a terrible consequence.

God's love warns us of a real danger.

Don't be fooled that there is no danger. That was the very first deceit of the devil in the Garden of Eden. You will not die. But they did.

[14 : 46] It's precisely why God gave us Jesus. If the danger is perishing, then the destiny of love is eternal life.

Not simply endless life. Not just life that goes on and on and on and on. Many of us wouldn't want that. But literally, eternal life is the life of the age to come.

It's the life of something better. Of a better age, a better era. A better quality is what's in the mind of eternal. Yes, it's everlasting. It never ends.

But it's perfect. That's the point. It's a life without pain and crying and tears. It's a life of absolute and total satisfaction and joy. A life of no frustration.

No futility. No aches and pains. No dissatisfaction. An abundantly fulfilling life. An endlessly satisfying life.

[15 : 44] And it's a gift. And it's a gift. made possible by Jesus given for us. This is a very familiar story.

It's a very famous verse. It's a very famous verse. Don't let familiarity breed indifference, let alone contempt.

It's so easy for the story to just sort of wash over us. And we're left unchanged. This is a gift worth looking in the mouth.

Because the mouth that speaks this gift is truly speaking God's word. This is what real love is.

A real love that culminates in a brave action for a world that is hostile to almighty God. But this is a gift that can be yours.

[16 : 46] It can be yours not just for Christmas but for life. For eternal life. This is a gift worth having. This is a gift that will last much longer than anything you're given tomorrow.

The socks and jocks will wear out. The toys batteries will fail or the kids will crush them. Whatever else we get, glasses or whatever, they'll get chipped and broken and thrown out.

This gift lasts forever. It never dulls. It never fades. It never dissatisfies. We can never move on to anything better.

This is a gift worth having. And it may be that you've never received it in faith. You may know the story inside out and back to front.

But never actually thought, I want this gift of eternal life. And I want to believe in Jesus Christ. For whoever believes, it's got a continuous sense about it.

[17 : 51] It's not just believe once, way back in the past. It's about ongoing belief. Daily belief.

Constant belief. That your whole life is actually reshaped and reformed and transformed by trusting in Jesus' death for our sins.

And that's the gift that's on offer. Tonight. Any night. But don't delay. The danger is real. There's a real danger of perishing if we don't accept this gift with real faith.

Let me urge you. Seriously to consider. What is your relationship with Almighty God? Have you accepted the gift of Jesus Christ?

Because that's what Christmas is all about. And if actually you've never accepted it in your heart and living a life following Jesus, then the hymns and songs and prayers are in the end pretense. Maybe hypocrisy. Certainly devoid of personal meaning. Mild he lays his glory by. Born that man no more may die.

[19 : 04] Born to raise the sons of earth. Born to give them second birth. Hail the heaven born prince of peace. Hail the son of righteousness. Light and life.

To all he brings. Risen with healing in his wings. The invitation of this famous verse is to look to and trust in Jesus.

Lifted up to die. So that we may have eternal life. And not perish. No wonder the herald angels sang. Glory to the newborn king.