

19-12-99 PM - Why 2K?

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Date: 19 December 1999

Preacher: Paul Barker

[0 : 00] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 19th of December 1999. The preacher is Paul Barker and his sermon is entitled Why? W-H-Y 2K?

Christian Merck. Egypt Air wishes to announce a forthcoming safety measure.

There will be no flights on New Year's Eve or New Year's Day at the end of this year. That was cold comfort, I must say, when I read that in the Egypt Air brochure at the back of the seat in front of me just recently.

Especially cold comfort after the crash in the North Atlantic six weeks ago. Maybe you heard that the Panama Canal has just this week been handed over to the control of the country of Panama. Up till now it's been under the control of the United States. It was handed over to the control of Panama this week because nobody was prepared to go for a ceremony on New Year's Eve which was the day when it was meant to be passed over to Panama.

[1 : 23] When I was in Nigeria last week somebody has already accumulated thousands of naira under his bed or somewhere like that because he doesn't trust the banks after New Year's Eve just in case.

I'm not sure that anyone should ever trust the banks anyway in Nigeria but the 31st of December is especially bad day to trust them. But on the other hand London has this grand new dome as well as a new tube line to get to it.

And Melbourne hotels are charging up to ten times their normal prices for rooms on New Year's Eve. Wherever we are whoever we are the millennium is bugging us all in some way.

And are you ready for that momentous stay? Is your pantry full of tinned food because we expect the supermarkets to collapse in a heap?

Are your mattresses stuffed with dollars because you don't think the ATMs will work after New Year's Eve? To be honest I'll be in bed when it goes from this year to next year I think.

[2 : 39] That's the safest place to be. For some people the millennium is a portent of doom. In Israel they are very concerned about fanatical Christian groups like those from Holy Trinity that go there because they're worried that they're going to all commit mass suicide.

And so they have screened and prevented some Christian groups from going there in the next few months. Others reflecting on the news of this year as we have even heard Rowan Forster give us the news during this service.

Earthquakes in Greece and Turkey and Japan wars East Timor not least hurricanes in the United States signs of the end times some say doom is on its way.

But that's nothing new. In the year 999 exactly the same sorts of things were happening although Egypt air didn't exist then of course.

in fact the reason why the Crusades happened in the 11th century is because the end of the world didn't come at 1000 AD and suddenly they realised that the reason was because they didn't get to Jerusalem so they hurried up to Jerusalem to try and bring about the end of the world but it still didn't end.

[4 : 04] But in the 1840s in the 1970s in 1948 and on the 9th of September this very year there have been people who've predicted doom and gloom and end of the world.

In our own century the war to end all wars didn't because it led to World War II Korea Vietnam Angola Bosnia Timor Chechnya and the list could go on all night.

Our century began with war the Boer War it will end with war. The century before ours began with war Nelson fighting the French and ended with war and if my history were good enough I could probably say the same about the centuries preceding that.

But on the other hand there are those who think the new millennium is a sign of hope. It's going to usher in a glorious new age of peace prosperity of goodwill and harmony between people around the world.

It's certainly a time for party and certainly a time for optimism. I think it's Michael Jackson who thinks that because he's going to have two parties. I think it's one in Hawaii or somewhere this side of the dateline and then he's going to fly over the other side of the dateline and do it all again and make a fortune probably.

[5 : 32] My sister's going to celebrate with a party she's already planning where to park. She's going to finish work late afternoon in Canberra on New Year's Eve drive straight up to Sydney park at a certain spot she's got reserved at the ABC car park in Sydney and then walk to the rocks or the Sydney harbour area for the party to end all parties.

It won't. There'll be more parties after that I'm sure. And Anglican churches in this country and in England have been told that we should be ringing our bells all on New Year's Eve because it's a great time of celebration.

I hope we're not because I'll be in bed. But that's nothing new either. That's not new because every year when we come to Christmas we think that it's the spirit and season of goodwill and peace and human harmony and joy and now at the end of another miserable year of failure the new year that's on its way will somehow be better.

And usually that optimism lasts until about midday on Christmas Day when the turkey's either undercooked or overcooked the children's toys have broken down and everybody's grumpy and I'm in bed.

And every New Year's Day people make all these resolutions about how they're going to be different people and that lasts until about the next day when they realise they're not. Indeed for decades if not centuries human beings have been living under the illusion that somehow we and society is getting better and we're making progress.

[7 : 13] That more education is improving us. Earlier this century Christian churches around the world has their goal the conversion of the world to the Christian faith by the year 2000.

They've only got a few days to go and many millions of people and there was somebody who thought that we would end child poverty at least in this country before the end of the millennium. What a foolish thing that was to expect. To be honest I expect the new millennium will be totally anticlimactic. It is after all an artificial date.

It's probably the wrong year that Jesus was born. He was born in about 6 or 7 BC and it probably wasn't the 25th of December. If anything it's more likely April or September.

I think the next millennium will be more of the same. There's nothing new under the sun. But whether we're optimistic or pessimistic or just indifferent about the new millennium there are at least two important things to consider.

[8 : 21] Y2K is about the birth of Jesus. Whether or not we believe in him that is why it's there. Even if the year is wrong as it is and the day is wrong as it is Jesus is the cause of it.

His birth is the cause of it. No other baby ever born has had that sort of impact on society. We don't celebrate the birthday of any ancient person at all.

I don't even know the birthday of Mozart one of my great heroes and I never celebrate it. There's been no other baby ever like him. And it's not because he didn't cry.

I'm sure he did. No other person has lived and made such claims that are true as Jesus. In the last reading that we heard tonight I have come as light into the world.

Not just a flickering candle but Jesus claim in those words was that he was in effect God. God as a human being.

[9 : 34] The light of God himself in this world revealing who God is living a perfect life to show who God is living as God would have us live.

God is not. And in that reading we also heard his claim. I came not to judge the world but to save the world.

What audacious claims for somebody to make. He's either mad to make them or astonishingly he's true.

but 2,000 years on it doesn't look as though he did much. Our world doesn't look any different really under the skin as it did in Roman Palestine 2,000 years ago.

We can hardly say that our world is saved can we? Look around the world does it look saved? Do one and a half million Sudanese Christians who have been killed or made refugee in recent years do they look saved?

[10 : 47] East Timor poverty in our own country loneliness and depression in our own country. You see even Christians aren't immune from the problems of our own world.

Many of them live in dire circumstances. At one level it's hard to believe that that baby did anything at all. And maybe just maybe putting on our cynical hats we could think that Y2K is nonsense. But the second important point about it puts it all into its real context. Again in that last reading that Helen read for us Jesus said on the last day the word that I have spoken will serve as the judge. We cannot afford to be indifferent about the future. You see history is not meaningless. It's not a static depressed society.

It's not even circular. It is heading towards a finishing line. It's heading towards a decisive day. And that is not the 31st of December 1999 or if it is it's just a fluke.

[12 : 19] It is heading to a particular final day. And the calendar change that we're about to make in a couple of weeks time should make us more alert.

The final day draws closer. Christmas should make us more alert to that. Because we celebrate the first coming of Jesus and every time we celebrate his first coming born in a stable in Bethlehem we should think he said he's coming back.

And every Christmas we're getting closer to that day. And when we change the millennium as we're about to do this year or next depending on how pedantic you are we are getting closer to that decisive and final day.

And that is the day that will make all the difference in a sense. That is the day when all people alive or dead, white or black, rich or poor, Australian or non-Australian, Richmond supporters and non-Richmond supporters, those who stay in bed on years, even those who don't, all of them will stand under the scrutiny of that person's word on that final and decisive day.

On that day, history's meaning will be seen by all. You see, what gives history its meaning is not just an artificial date or a number of a day or a year.

[13 : 55] what gives us, what gives history, what gives our lives, our actions, our thoughts and our words meaning will be on that final decisive day being judged by the word of Jesus himself.

That's the day to get ready for. That's the day to plan for. People have been planning for New Year's Eve this year for several years, booking plane flights or avoiding them, booking hotel rooms, booking parties.

One couple who's being married here on the day before New Year's Eve is being married on that day because they couldn't get a reception on New Year's Eve. People have been preparing for this day for a long time.

But the day to prepare for is the day when Jesus returns, the day when you and I and all of us will stand under the scrutiny of his word, the day when history as we know it draws to its close.

But that's not doom necessarily, but nor is it necessarily just pure optimism either. It is good news if we grasp it aright because Jesus' first coming tells us how to prepare for his second coming.

[15 : 22] And he doesn't tell us to stockpile our food or stash our dollars in our mattress. He doesn't tell us to avoid Egypt Air or any other airlines for that matter.

Jesus tells us how to prepare for that final day when he says that everyone who believes in me will not remain in darkness. Look around the world today and it looks that there's no difference between Christian or non-Christian whether in darkness or light though there is underneath.

And it's on this final day that the difference will be seen. The preparation believe in Jesus Christ. Trust in him.

That's what it means. Not just to believe that he existed like we know that Napoleon or Julius Caesar existed but to place our trust in the baby of Bethlehem and in the cross of Calvary.

Jesus' warning is that everyone who rejects me and does not receive my word will fail to pass the scrutiny of that final day. Again, words in effect from that last reading tonight.

[16 : 43] Let me invite you to celebrate this Christmas with real and sincere and understandable confidence, joy and hope.

Jesus has come to save as he said he had. His death is how he did it. His mission was successful. It's been fully accomplished even if on the surface of our world today nothing seems much to have changed.

for those who place their trust in him we can eagerly and optimistically and excitedly await and prepare for that final day.

A new millennium is certainly a cause to celebrate his first coming 2,000 years ago. But more than that the change of the millennium takes us closer to his return and that's what his first coming was all about us being ready for when he comes back.

Let's make sure that we're ready by placing our trust in him. even in that